

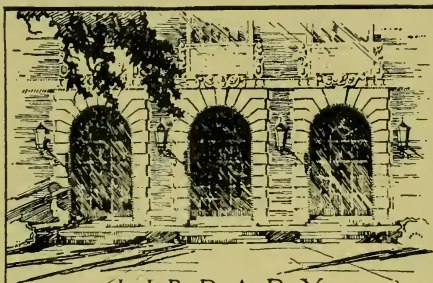


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GRANTHAM SECRETS.



# GRANTHAM SECRETS.

A Nobel.

BY

PHŒBE M. FEILDEN.

*IN THREE VOLUMES.*

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# GRANTHAM SECRETS.

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## CHAPTER I.

THE engagement was “a secret,” so every one said to every one else. For it was very soon a secret known to every one belonging to the neighbourhood of Darlingster! Alice Craycroft knew it even before it was revealed to her, in confidence, by Miles Grantham’s self, on the morning before he left Grantham Hall. Indeed she had previously arranged her cheerful congratulations, with a carefully inserted touch of reproachful tenderness, and a look which must for certain pierce his heart, if of heart he were of truth possessed. She was pale and solemn as death when he entered, for she had not thought it necessary to rub the colour into her woe-worn cheeks,

or to exercise and train into apparently gay movement the muscles of her face. She was quite content that he should see the "wreck" which his "base conduct," as she now felt justified in considering his behaviour towards herself, had wrought in her. But on his appearance, all her set speeches were forgotten. When he thanked her, with sorrow in his voice and face, for all that she had done for him, the reproaches which she had prepared died away into tender sympathy. And when he had wished her a mournful "good-bye" (for who could say how long?), she was left with the conviction that he had been forced by his friends into an engagement against which his heart rebelled. She was convinced that that heart was on the road to breakage; and she determined, at all costs, to save it from so hard a fate. An indisposition, which had been "aggravated," she informed her bosom friends and confidants, "by wearing heart trouble," having confined her to the house, she employed this period of invalidism in writing plaintive letters to Miles, alluding

to his "good fortune," but taking care to let him know that she felt it to be ill fortune,—in musing bitterly, but not hopelessly or aimlessly; and in throwing out mysterious hints to the various young lady friends by whom she was visited.

These hints were quickly thrown broadcast about the neighbourhood, with variations by different authors. Some of them even reached Margaret, in the sublime heights of her martyrdom. But they affected her little. She moved serenely, sustained by the sense of self-sacrifice, and the cold atmosphere of her serenity was warmed by her mother's sunny smiles and ardent caresses. It was so pleasant to see Mrs. Willoughby well and cheerful, and to have a respite from grumble and querulousness, that she found it easy to be gay, and only did not dare to let herself look too closely at that to which she had pledged herself,—to allow herself to realize the cost of the blessing which had been gained. And still, in a strange unreal fashion, which appeared to herself most real, she made Charles

Meredith the companion of her thoughts and feelings, and imagined him looking with approving eyes on the sacrifice she had made for her mother's sake. It by no means seemed to her that she was separating herself from Charles Meredith, rather everything that happened, everything that she did, must, it appeared, draw her the more closely to him. But this unnatural state of things could not last for ever. A reaction was inevitable. There were many reactions and counter-reactions. There were days when she fell down from her heights into dreary plains, only to reascend with the consciousness of having gained a victory over herself. But there came a day when she found herself too weak for reascension. The depression continued. She realized what she had done, told herself that she could not bear it, looked to see if there would be any possibility of backing out, and remembered, hopelessly, that she had promised that this time she would not disappoint her mother. She could see no way out of her trouble, even though a still small



voice whispered to her that by her self-imposed martyrdom she was doing evil that good might come. Even though her heart sank with the conviction that, after all, no good would come, that her mother would not be happy in her misery, she did not dare to break her promise. She thought, shudderingly, of what might happen if, after all her professions of submission, she were to grieve and anger her mother by retracting the given pledge. So once more she felt that there was nothing for it but to hope against hope that something would occur during the coming year to alter the present aspect of affairs. But what could occur? Her own heart would remain the same, and what else would alter in any way that would affect its wishes? No,—she was doomed! unless,—her heart beat quickly with a new sense of hope,—unless death should come as an escape from the sin and misery of fulfilling her promise! Yet no, that possible escape might not be desired, for if she died, what would become of her mother? In spite of herself her manner became different. She

broke down for a trifle, in the effort to be gay. She vexed her mother when she most intended to be gentle. Thus the short-lived serenity gradually passed away. Mrs. Willoughby sank back again into the invalid habits and nervous eccentricities from which Margaret's self-sacrifice had been intended to deliver her. And with all her secret trouble, poor Margaret had to bear with as many scoldings, and as much querulousness and discontent as ever.

## CHAPTER II.

ON his return, about this time, from a tour on the continent, Mr. Thomas paid a visit to The Cottage. Various reports relating to Margaret had reached him, and although he called ostensibly on his patient, Mrs. Willoughby, the real motive at work with him was anxiety on his friend Margaret's account. "I feel convinced that they have been bullying the child into some scrape," he said to himself, "and if I don't do my best to help her out of it, my name's not Ben Thomas. They'll bully her into her grave if they don't take care." He had caught a glimpse of her wistful little colourless face, the tender brightness of which seemed to come from some far-away land; and had observed that it had lost its roundness, and half the beauty which health and

youthful spirits had before given to it ; and the momentary vision had at once touched and angered him. Others had remarked upon Margaret's altered looks ; but the secretive doctor, who never gossiped himself, and who listened with only half an ear to the gossip of others, nevertheless knew more about Margaret than was known by his inquisitive neighbours.

“ I believe I have to congratulate you, Miss Willoughby,” he said, as he shook hands with Margaret on coming down from the room in which Mrs. Willoughby was nursing her headache. But the look with which he accompanied his congratulations entirely frustrated the attempt at gaiety with which she would have received it. “ Joy has not improved your health, I am afraid,” he went on ; “ you are not looking so well as you were when I saw you last.”

“ I am quite well, thanks,” replied Margaret.

“ Mrs Willoughby gave a different account of you. She wished me to have a talk with you ; but first, I want you to tell me,

as an old friend, if there is anything that I can do to help you ? ”

“ Nothing, thanks, no,—nothing. No body can do anything.”

But he was so kindly persistent, that she soon found herself coming out with much concerning herself which she had intended to be a secret from all the world.

“ There is no knowing what may turn up before a year has gone by. You must keep up your heart, Miss Willoughby, and hope on, hope ever, you know,” he said.

“ I am tired of hoping,” returned Margaret, dejectedly. “ I don’t see what could happen that would be of any use. Things that seem as if they were going to be good always go to the bad, and end in making matters worse than ever. It would kill mamma if I were to back out of this. Besides, I have promised that she shall not be disappointed again. There is only one thing that could happen that would help me. Oh, if only it was not wrong and selfish to wish to die ! ”

“ Well, Miss Willoughby, “ returned the

doctor, with a kind laugh, "I am afraid the vows of my profession will not quite allow me to help you in that way. So I must try to think of something that will make you more in love with life. Do you know what I am disposed to prescribe for you, and for your mamma too? A trip to Switzerland,—what do you say? I really think that you would find it of use in many ways."

"I don't much care where we go, or what we do," returned Margaret; "but I am afraid mamma will scarcely be inclined for such an undertaking. Do you think she is up to it?"

"To be sure I do. I have already hinted at my notion to her, and she did not seem altogether averse from it, though I have not yet exhausted a quarter of my arguments in its favour."

"Well, if she likes it, I am quite agreeable," said Margaret, with something of her old animation. "It might perhaps do her good, and that is everything."

"And it may also so change the current of her thoughts and wishes as to change the

current of affairs in which you take an interest. Who knows what may not be effected by it, Miss Willoughby? ”

Margaret shook her head, but somehow hope had begun to creep back again into her heart. And soon she was listening, with real interest, to descriptions of old French towns, fine cathedrals, Swiss mountains, gorges, passes and snow peaks, until at length she began to think that the doctor must be right, and that these various charms must indeed be possessed of powers by which all difficulties and all troubles might easily be smoothed away.

“ I hope my mother will agree to it,” she said at last ; “ but how I wish that you could come with us as courier, Mr. Thomas ! ”

“ I wish I could, but as this is out of the question, I shall be happy to do anything I can in the way of making arrangements for you with a courier, and in shaping out a little tour for you. I am coming to see your mamma to-morrow, and I shall tell her of the plot which you and I have been hatching between us, Miss Willoughby.”

“I am afraid she is not up to roughing it, and is not well enough to enjoy mountain expeditions, or life in out-of-the-way pensions,” said Margaret. “I should like nothing better for myself, but mamma prefers civilized society.”

“Yes, you must take it easily, and go to all the best hotels. I should recommend you to make a circuitous route to Switzerland, through some of the old French towns, resting here and there for a night or two; then giving up a couple of days, not more, to Geneva and to Vevey, and so on to Fribourg, where you would find, at the Zähringer Hof, capital head quarters for a short time. The old town is full of interest and beauty, and by the latter part of September, when you would reach it, you would not find it overwhelmingly hot, as it certainly was when I was there in July. Moreover there is the advantage of a first-rate English physician there, just for the present. I ought hardly, perhaps, to call him English, for he has lived so much at Fribourg, that its inhabitants look upon



him as one of themselves; but he studied medicine in London as well as in Paris, lived many years in England, and whatever country his family may belong to, he is decidedly more English in his manner and ways than either Swiss, French, or German. I know him a little, and should be glad to give you a letter of introduction to him, in case Mrs. Willoughby should need medical aid."

Mr. Thomas' influence prevailed with Mrs. Willoughby. Due arrangements and preparations were made. And by the first of September, Margaret and her mother left The Cottage, *en route* for Havre.

"I wonder what Gilling has been about this morning," said Margaret, as the carriage drove off; "he promised to come to The Cottage to say 'good-bye,' and receive last orders."

"He is not well, miss, this morning," returned Jane, as she busied herself in arranging packages, which might possibly come in the way of her mistress' feet.

"Not well? Oh, if I had known, poor old

man, I might have found time to run down to see him! What is the matter with him, Jane?"

"There, there's plenty to see to him, Miss Margaret. Miss Craycroft was down there last night, and them from the Hall,—and there's Mr. Thomas, and Mr. Bowles, and all been with him this morning."

"But what is the matter with him?" exclaimed Margaret. Jane was silent, but turning her face away from Mrs. Willoughby, replied by the most hideous pantomimic gestures that Margaret had ever seen.

"What is it?" then, asked Mrs. Willoughby, suspiciously. "Nothing infectious? You have not been to see him, Jane, in scarlatina or small-pox?"

"Bless you, no, ma'am. I didn't want to give you a shock, and you just starting off on a journey; but Miss Margaret is so inconsiderate."

"But what is it, then, Jane? Speak the truth. Is it small-pox?"

"No, ma'am, no; don't you agitate yourself. It's nothing, ma'am; only I believe as he was took with something like the hapo-plexy last night."

## CHAPTER III.

“How beautiful it is! and what a wonderful look it has in the moonlight! I am glad we have come in for a moon, and yet I long for it to be to-morrow morning, that one may see the colouring of that lovely Gotteron, and distinguish the rock amidst the foliage, and follow the windings of the river more clearly, and find out the history of all those quaint old buildings. That, I suppose, must be part of the old castle just before us; and there run the city walls, I suppose. How much of that is old wall, I wonder? And what is that odd, low building? It looks like a convent built on to the walls. How well that splendid suspension bridge comes in! Don’t you long to get on to it, mother? Fancy what the view must be! I shall not know which way to go first to-morrow; but

I think I should like to clamber down that rocky steep, and get amidst those picturesque old houses, and along that path towards the Gotteron; and then I think one might clamber up some way to the farther end of the bridge. The whole thing looks like a mysterious dream, just now!"

And with the sensation of having known Fribourg before, in some glorious dream-land of long ago, or in some former state of existence, Margaret Willoughby leaned back in her chair, closed her eyes, and gave herself up to an Elysian of thought and feeling. She was seated with her mother in the outer court of the Zähringer Hof; and in giving excited expression to surprise and eager delight, had not observed any lack of enthusiasm in her mother's short and languid answers and chimings in of assent.

Even Mrs. Willoughby, however, was feeling something of the charms of that lovely September evening, with the peculiar beauty of the scene before her; and she was by no means prepared to quarrel with the luxuries of the pleasant old Hôtel

Zähringen, to which her travels had finally brought her.

“I think I should like to stay here for good and all,” should not you, mother?” said Margaret, presently, laughing.

“It is a comfortable hotel, certainly,” returned Mrs. Willoughby, “but then so was *Les trois Couronnes*.”

“Yes,—and oh, that view! It has been a perfect tour, altogether, and how well you have born it, mother!”

“Pretty well,—better than might have been expected; but I have often suffered when you have known nothing of it,” said Mrs. Willoughby, with a resigned sigh.

“Have you, poor mother? Well, you will have a good rest here, and that will do you good. I got a home-like feeling for Fribourg, directly I saw it in the twilight, from the railway, and as we drove through the streets, I felt sure it would prove to be a delightful place. I wish we might live here! I wish we need not go back to Grantham any more!” A thousand unpleasant remembrances connected with

Grantham crossed Margaret's mind, as she spoke and sighed. "Poor old home!" she added remorsefully, to herself. "But then I seem to have its dear old self, as it used to be, with me here, far more really than I have when I am in it as it is now, all different and wretched. Every one I have ever loved seems to come to me here, and everything beautiful that I have ever seen."

As Margaret thus mused, all her experiences since leaving home seemed to pass quickly before her eyes, in a series of dissolving views, in which gold-tipped snow-peaks, jagged mountain sides, pine forests, cathedrals, old streets, covered archways, and bright gardens were jumbled together in strange dream-like confusion, and were unaccountably associated in her imagination with all her dearest and sweetest feelings and thoughts.

"It is like touching for a moment the unseen world, and finding in its rest all the past life that one had fancied dead," so rather felt than thought Margaret. But her

musings were abruptly interrupted by her mother, who exclaimed, rather plaintively,

“Margaret, do you know that it is getting late?”

“Yes, so it is,” replied Margaret, cheerfully, “and you ought to have your coffee and go to bed. But you are not so tired to-day as you have been after other journeys. I begin to think that Mr. Thomas is going to prove right, and that this tour is bringing you a new lease of health.”

“My dear Margaret,” replied Mrs. Willoughby, with a sigh, “will you ever learn to understand nerves? I am excited this evening; to-morrow the reaction will come, and then you will be surprised to to see me suffering. I fear indeed,”—and she put her hand upon her head,—“that I have done a little too much; and I trust, for your sake, that I may not be about to reap the consequences of my imprudence, in a serious illness so far from home.”

“But mother dear, we have taken it very quietly, and have done exactly as Mr. Thomas advised. Please don’t carry gloomy



fancies to bed with you ! You must not be ill here, you have so much to see and do, and I have been intending this place to complete the cure. And you must be up to enjoying the amusement of the *table d'hôte*."

"I hope so, my dear," said Mrs. Willoughby, with a shake of her head. "Don't trouble yourself about me, Margaret. I trust that you will enjoy yourself, if I must suffer, and it is a comfort to know something about one of the doctors at Fribourg."

"One of the doctors? Oh, I had forgotten all about that tiresome doctor!" cried Margaret, with laughing impatience.

"I hope you have not lost Mr. Thomas's letter of introduction!" cried Mrs Willoughby, in quick alarm.

"Oh dear no; I have put it safely away somewhere, and shall find it all right if it is wanted. But we have done very well without doctors hitherto, and I hope we may go on to the end without their aid. Please, mother, don't be ill here!" she continued, in an imploring tone, adding



lightly, "if you are I shall write to Mr. Thomas, and inform him that it is all his fault, for telling us about this favourite doctor of his. So long as we knew nothing about any doctors, we were well. Ah, well, you must go and rest thoroughly to-night and to-morrow, and be ready for an excursion on Monday. Good-night, darling mother; mind, you are to be asleep by the time I come to bed."

"Miss Margaret," said Jane, when she came in to help Margaret to undress that night,—“Miss Margaret, whatever have you been doing to missis? She's been in hysterics, in a dreadful way. I haven't seen her so *hill* not since we left home. You really should be more considerate, miss."

"I'm afraid the journey has been a little bit too much for her, but I hope she will be all right to-morrow," returned Margaret, quietly, though her heart sank on hearing Jane's words, and her pleasant visions of coming enjoyment vanished beneath a sudden load of anxiety.

"Yes, Miss Margaret, it is easy for you to

say that ! You who have been exciting of her, and speaking inconsiderate and unsympathizing. You forget that she is not robust, like you, who thinks of nothing but your own pleasure, and is never tired of gadding about. She'll be going out like the snuff of a candle, before you knows where you are ; and she in foreign parts, and all, and far away from friends and home."

. "Nonsense, Jane, don't croak," said Margaret, half angrily, half laughingly.

But Jane's croaking left an impression behind it which tired Margaret vainly tried to shake off. And she lay down in the little bedroom that opened into her mother's, feeling lonely and desolate, and full of gloomy forebodings.

## CHAPTER III.

MRS. WILLOUGHBY was as good as her word. She had a worse attack of nervous illness the day after her arrival at Fribourg than she had had since she left home.

“Your mamma’s head’s dreadful bad this morning,” said Jane, coming into Margaret’s room. “You’re not to go near her, on no account.”

“She will not get up to breakfast, then?”

“Get up to breakfast!” screamed Jane. “Miss Margaret, where’s your feelings?”

“Then please get me my breakfast up here, Jane, and I’ll go out afterwards; and tell mamma I shall come in and give her an account of all I have seen and done as soon as she is well enough to see me. I’ll go into the court to have a conversation with

the very delightful parrot out there, until my coffee is ready.”

“Parrot! I never knew such a place as this is for parrots, and whistling men, and noise of all sorts, enough to kill your mamma, outright; but little you care, Miss Margaret, so that you can amuse yourself,” said Jane, severely. “Your mamma may be well-nigh on her death-bed, without your troubling yourself so much as to stir your little finger.”

However, Margaret was not to be so easily affected by Jane’s croaking and exaggerated expressions on this exhilarating September morning as she had been in her fatigue of the night before. She was vexed about her mother’s headache, but hoped that it would pass off, as at other times, by the afternoon, and did not feel that there was any call for especial anxiety. And as she went out into the delicious morning air, and feasted her eyes on the beautiful view,—which she found to be even more intensely beautiful in the brilliant September sunshine than it had been as a moonlit scene,—it was quite im-

possible to be otherwise than glad and hopeful. Her gladness, too, was less dreamy, less mingled with strange, almost unnatural, sensations than had been the case the evening before.

An interview with the very fascinating bird, which is one of the attractions to the visitors of the Hôtel Zähringen, and a conversation with the kind and pleasant *maitre d'hôtel*, helped her to pass a few minutes agreeably enough.

But Margaret was eager to have done with her breakfast, and be free for an exploring expedition about the town: and soon that wished-for moment arrived. She got out before the sun had become oppressively hot, and wandered through the quaint streets, past the cathedral, and then down into the lower part of the town, stopping every moment to look about her and admire and wonder, and feeling as if some spirit were transporting her into scenes of long ago, or as if a thousand strange stories and curious dreams had suddenly started into life and reality.

“Ah,” she said, presently, to herself, with a sigh of admiration, “I must come here to sketch! I will come here to-morrow. How beautiful it is, in this perfect light and shadow, and with that glorious sky looking down upon it!—and with all those picturesque people about! It is like a story. How odd it is to think that I am really here!”

The corner which had fascinated Margaret was a small space of open ground, in the midst of which stood a quaintly-carved fountain. Looking upon it was a picturesquely built row of cottages. Groups of people in bright holiday costume were standing near the fountain, or sitting on the pavement outside their houses, talking to each other, volubly, in German or French. As Margaret stood gazing on the scene, an old woman, with a beautiful face,—such as she had seen in pictures,—framed by a rich crimson head-dress,—a handkerchief fastened three-corner-ways, so as to droop at the back,—came out of one of the houses, carrying a child carefully wrapped up. She put

the boy tenderly down in a reclining chair, made easy by cushions, and then stooped down to kiss him, and whisper caressing words. Something about the sick child reminded Margaret of little Jack, by whose death-bed she had stood so long ago. And she felt irresistibly drawn towards the little group.

“Is your little boy very ill?” she asked, in German.

“Ah,” replied the old woman, “my little grandson, Fraulein! He was dying. I thought I should have lost him. I saw him gradually fading away before my eyes. But the blessed Virgin sent the good doctor to cure him, and now the good God will let him get well. He is better. Soon he will be well! See, he is able to play with the pretty toys that the kind gentleman brings to him.”

While the old woman spoke, the little plaintive face was brightened by a smile, and as she put one of the prettily carved Swiss toys into his hand, he laughed, and said, “Kind gentleman!” And then, look-



ing wistfully round, cried out in his baby-German Swiss, the meaning of which Margaret could only guess at, that he wanted the "Herr" to come, that he wanted the good doctor so much! And while the old grandmother fondled him, and told him that the good doctor would surely come soon, that he would come most likely before the people got back from church, Margaret's heart felt sore with the memory of long ago, with the wish, that that other little sick child's longing, that her own passionate yearning of years gone by, could have been as easily answered and satisfied! But she talked and smiled with the old woman and the boy, until the cathedral bell began to ring, and the people, in twos and threes, to rise and wend their way to church.

"Is that for the mass?" asked Margaret.

"Ah, to be sure, for the blessed mass!" said the woman, crossing herself. "But the dear Lord will pardon the old woman who does not come! for He knows that she cannot leave her sick boy; and the holy priests



will say a prayer for her, and will ask the good God to make her boy well. And the good Fraulein will say a prayer for the little Fritz, that he may soon be well and able to play about with the other little children.”

Half to the child and half to the Fraulein, the words were said, in a petting and entreating tone of voice. And Margaret answered with a farewell smile, and a promise not to forget little Fritz, and to come again soon, and bring something pretty.

“Come again soon, and bring something pretty,” echoed the baby tones.

And then Margaret went her way. She followed the people, along by-ways and up steep ascents, to the higher part of the town, and, tired with her walk, was glad to reach the cathedral while the crowd was still thin, and to be able to find a front seat, quickly, and to kneel and rest before the service began. And when at last it began!—who could say what her feelings were as the soft tones of the marvellous organ stole their way into the secret parts of her soul, and spoke of an ineffable sweet-

ness? or as they rose and swelled and overwhelmed her with a sense of a Might above all other might? Who could express her feelings as the voices of the choir, soft and gentle and powerful, thrilled through her heart with a mingling of sorrow, yearning pain, peace, and joy unutterable? To her it seemed as if an angel choir from afar were speaking to her spirit and saying, "Come up higher!" Who could express her feelings as her eyes followed the solemn movements of the priest engaged in the celebration? All the joy and sorrow of her life, and of the lives of others, all that was precious, all that was evil in herself, and in the world, seemed in a moment to be present with her; and, amidst all, a persuasive Voice seemed to be saying, "Be still! Was ever sorrow like unto My sorrow?"

Call it enthusiasm, call it fancy, imagination, unreality, nervous excitability, call it what you will, I, who know Margaret, and the truth and simplicity of her nature, can call it nothing less than faith: faith, by

which she recognized, in the earnest celebration of God's service, the expression of things invisible! faith, by which she was raised above all worldliness and delusion, all vain fancy, all mere opinion, all the clashing of the creeds, all impurity and error, into the land of Eternal Love, where truth, purity, and goodness move freely, and are disturbed by no barriers, such as in lower regions would be termed "differences of opinion."—The music was glorious, and as grandly expressed as Mozart himself could have desired. But Margaret did not think of this. The same spirit which brought out the intricacies of each sacred movement in all their fulness, carried to her heart something of their beauty and their meaning. The ceremonial was gorgeous and effective. But Margaret was not conscious of considering pictorial effect. It was the sense of an earnest purpose at work in the service, a spirit of earnestness and simplicity making itself felt through the hearts of the people, that was in truth impressing her, and awakening new depths of devotion in her soul.

Yes,—and she might have remembered hours spent in one of the ugliest churches in London, where the service was “plain and unadorned,” where the music offered no attractions, where there was no “artistic effect” of any description, but where yet the same spirit of simple reality at work had brought the same sense of an unseen Power present, the same intense perception of things invisible, the same awe, love, pain, peace, and joy!—where the words, “Was ever sorrow like unto my sorrow?” had also been heard and felt, like a new revelation from One present with her!—where she had been raised above all that was ugly and inharmonious, into a land of inexpressible loveliness, where “angels and archangels and all the company of heaven” were singing in a harmony that was infinitely beautiful!

But to return to the present scene in Fribourg Cathedral. Glancing inadvertently now and again at those near to her, she was struck by an almost transfigured expression on their hideous faces. “Frightful people,”

she even then noticed many of them to be, and yet with such a look upon their features as made them for the time being seem almost beautiful: a self forgetful look, as though they were rapt into a goodness not their own,—given up with One Who was given up for them. Surely those simple hearts were feeling, at that moment, the meaning of love, sacrifice, and atonement, as no verbal explanation could have made them feel it. Whether they lived the meaning, or whether the impression made was only transitory in its nature,—whether it lived and moved in their actions,—belonged to another question, which Margaret was not called upon to solve. Neither did it enter her head to consider it, but, saying to herself, “It must do one good to look at those ugly, honest, holy faces!” without any disturbance to her own devotional feelings, she glanced around her again, and, as she did so, she suddenly caught a momentary glimpse of a pair of eyes with such a look on them, in them, through them, as for eight years had haunted her!—an inspired look, the look of one who

had received a divine mission, which he was steadfastly resolved, at all costs, to fulfil! What did it mean? Was it reality? Was it fancy? Was it the intensity of recollection? Did it belong to the vision of perfect sacrifice, holy union, blessed communion, which was passing before her spirit's eye at the time? It was strange, and yet it hardly surprised her. So naturally and harmoniously did it chime in with her sacred thoughts and feelings, that it did not stir up a single restless longing or painful impression. It only seemed to repeat the assurance that all her earthly treasures were blest, were safe, in the shelter of heaven's All-Perfect Love. She gazed around her once more, almost involuntarily, and searched through the crowd. But the eyes with that unmistakable look, which had lived in her memory so long as almost to have become, as it were, a part of herself, were now nowhere to be seen.

When the service was over, Margaret would willingly have remained in the stillness of the cathedral, after the crowd had dispersed, but thinking that her mother might



be getting anxious about her, she made her way out as quickly as she could.

As she passed through the southern doorway, her eyes were attracted by a little knot of people in the middle of the street. A poor old cripple had dropped her crutch, had tripped and fallen. A tall broad-shouldered man was supporting her, placing her crutch, and speaking to her in gentle words. Others had gathered round, some to look on, and some to offer aid, but most seemed to be making known their wants to the "good gentleman," and, with looks and words, to be imploring help for themselves and others. Many sick and infirm people seemed to be amongst these. And all appeared to be looking up at him with reverent affection.

With kind words and gestures, he stilled the clamorous voices, and seemed at the same time to content the applicants, who one by one withdrew, and took their way towards the lower part of the town.

But there yet remained many lookers on, and behind some of these Margaret was still lingering, as though spell-bound.

Something in the attitude and movements of him who formed the centre of attraction in the group, something, an indefinable something, carried her back to long ago, reminded her of a long-lost friend, and made her heart beat fast and painfully. An indefinable something only, for the points of contrast between the almost boyish figure of her remembrance, and that of the vigorous looking man before her now, were at least as many as the points of resemblance. An indefinable something, also, as she caught a momentary glimpse of a strong and thoughtful much-lined and weather-beaten face, half covered with hair, and bearing the appendage of a long and silky beard,—an indefinable something brought vividly before her mind's eye the smooth young face of the friend who had told her of his love eight years before. An indefinable something made her heart stretch itself out, as it were, with a sudden passionate struggle, to reach across the gulf of years which separated it from a past that no regrets or efforts could bring back.

Unobserved herself, she continued to



gaze, until he whom she had been watching passed on through the crowd, with rapid steps which led him the contrary way from her's. Then, in a frame of mind strangely altered from what it had been on the moment of her leaving the cathedral, she hastened back to the Zähringen Hotel.

## CHAPTER V.

"YOUR mamma has been asking for you ever so many times, Miss Margaret," said Jane, severely, when Margaret encountered her outside her mother's door.

"Has she?" returned Margaret, in a vexed tone. "Has she been wanting me, then? Is she up?"

"Up? No, nor likely to be up. But when people's ill, it is only natural that they should like to have their friends about them, let alone children as does not seem to have a thought for anything but their own pleasure. She thought you had, perhaps, been to ask about the doctor, poor dear. But I said more likely as you was pleasing yourself."

"The doctor? Does she want a doctor?"

"Wants to know as you've got the address safe, anyhow, poor dear; and as likely as

not 'll want him before night, though she don't want to put any one out of the way by saying so?"

"You must have talked her into being nervous, and thinking herself ill," returned Margaret, rather angrily. "Mr. Thomas has told her and told us what she is to do when she is ill in this way. I don't see why we should bother her by calling in a strange doctor."

"No, Miss Margaret, nor you wouldn't trouble yourself to call in no one if she was dying," returned the offended maid.

But a plaintive call from within put a stop to the dispute, and Margaret opened the door, and went up to her mother's bed-side.

"Margaret, I am very ill," was the greeting she received from her mother.

"Are you, mother darling? But not worse than you generally are with your bad headaches?" said Margaret, tenderly.

"I have exerted myself more than usual, lately, and I am suffering for it," answered her mother. "Mr. Thomas asked me if I felt equal to the tour, and not liking to dis-

appoint you, I said yes. My poor child, I am sorry to spoil your pleasure by causing you anxiety on account of my miserable health! I am glad, for your sake, that we have Mr. Thomas's introduction to Dr. —, I forget the name,—you have not lost the letter? ”

“ Oh, no, it is all right, mother. ” But I hope we shall not want it. I hope to-morrow you will be much better again.”

“ I scarcely think it likely,” returned Mrs. Willoughby, in a hurt tone, “ that Mr. Thomas would have given the introduction, if he had not considered it probable that I should require a doctor.”

“ Then you think I had better call in the doctor? ”

“ *I* think so? Oh dear no, I only thought it might be a satisfaction to you, if—if—” the rest of the sentence was lost in a burst of hysterical weeping.

“ Well, perhaps I had better send the letter at once,” said Margaret, when she had composed her mother a little, and recovered from her own distressed astonishment.

“No, you will not send it,” said Mrs. Willoughby, sitting up and speaking with fierce energy. “We will *not* send for the doctor. I daresay I shall be much worse to-morrow, but that is of no consequence.”

“Nonsense, mother dear; we will send for him. I was only afraid of troubling you unnecessarily; and I did so hope that you were not going to be ill.” As she spoke, Margaret moved towards her own room door, but Mrs. Willoughby, with extraordinary strength and rapidity for a great invalid, passed Margaret, stood against the door, and took hold of her daughter’s arm.

“You shall not do it,” she said, excitedly. “You shall not send the letter. Mind, I forbid it, Margaret!”

“All right, mother,” answered Margaret. “I have no wish to send for him. It was only——”

“I know, I know! I know you have no wish on the subject,” cried Mrs. Willoughby. “You don’t mind, you are not anxious! Therefore there is no need to send.”

“Yes, if you feel very ill, there *is* need,” said Margaret.

“I desire that you will not,” returned Mrs. Willoughby; and jumping into bed again, she gave herself up to hysterics and smelling-salts for some hours.

But towards the hour of *table d'hôte* she got up, and languidly expressed her intention of coming down to dinner. When the bell of announcement had sounded, she entered the *salle-à-manger* and took her seat with the air of a martyr, and was proudly conscious that the eyes of the guests were fixed pityingly upon her, and that several murmurs of “How ill she looks!” were passing round the table. By degrees, however, she found herself enjoying a very excellent dinner, and becoming amused and agreeably excited. And when dinner was over she went out into the court, and talked and laughed, disregarding all Margaret’s injunctions against fatiguing herself.

Two letters were put into Margaret’s hand, and as she opened and read them,

she rather hoped that her mother had been too much engaged with her new acquaintances to observe the arrival. But it was not so.

"Letters, Margaret?" asked Mrs. Willoughby, as, having bowed "good evening" to an agreeable talker, she rejoined her daughter.

"Yes, mamma, but not with much news in them, except that poor old Gilling is gone at last. He seems to have suffered distressingly for a time, but then it was very peaceful and painless. Poor old man!" And Margaret's tears fell, as her thoughts travelled back to happy childish games with her old friend the gardener.

"Are the letters private?" asked Mrs. Willoughby, who was eager for gossip.

"Oh, no, mother. One is a long rigmarole from Alice Craycroft, full of mysterious hints, as usual. I don't know what she means, probably nothing. She writes in a sentimental and pitiful strain about changes and chances, and,"—to herself Margaret added, glancing again at

the letter,—“almost seems to hint at some calamitous revelation about to be made known to the world in general, and the Willoughbys in particular! What a girl she is for mystery and sensation!” she continued aloud, with a laugh. “In the last stage of her existence she must certainly have had some connection with the people in Mrs. Radcliff’s novels!”

“May I see the letter?” asked Mrs. Willoughby, eagerly putting out her hand to take it.

“I don’t think you will care to take the trouble to read it, and perhaps it is meant only for me,” returned Margaret, giving it up, reluctantly.

“What does she mean by this?” cried Mrs. Willoughby, in some agitation, presently, “‘Once more I wish you joy of the true heart which has been given to you, for *this* is an inheritance of which you never can be robbed!’”

“I really don’t know,” replied Margaret, laughing. “In the first place, I don’t quite understand in what sense the ‘precious



heart' to which she alludes is an '*inheritance*' of mine! but I suppose the expression must be looked upon as a poetical license, and that Alice is alluding, longingly, to the inheritance so nearly connected with the heart of which she would like to rob me!"

"Margaret, I wish you would not be so fond of jesting, when other people are anxious and unhappy," cried Mrs. Willoughby, whimpering. "The girl must mean something!"

"She probably means Darlingster gossip, mamma," replied Margaret, quietly. "Please don't frighten yourself for no reason."

"Is the other letter from home?" asked Mrs. Willoughby.

"Yes,—just a line from Lady Grantham."

"From Lady Grantham? Nothing for me? I am sure she would mean me to see it."

"She sends her love and is anxious to hear about you, and begs we will not believe any Darlingster gossip that may come to our ears, for—for we may be sure that it is

all nonsense,—or something to this effect. Shall I read you the letter, mamma? ”

“No, give it to me. My head aches too much for listening to reading,” and seizing the letter out of Margaret’s hand, she read it, with knitted brows and looks of gathering discontent and agitation.

“There must be something the matter,” she said, at last. “What does she mean by this? ‘I hope all unpleasantness,—all that seems dark just now,—will soon be cleared away.’ What sort of unpleasantness? What,—what can she mean? Oh, Margaret, Margaret, I feel that it is something connected with poor Miles! I feel that some great trouble is at hand for us all!”

“Oh, mother dear, depend upon it that it will be all right,” answered Margaret. “Does one ever think anything of Darlingster gossip? Please don’t worry yourself.”

But her mother was not to be so easily soothed. She went to bed in a frightful state of agitation, and awoke the next morning very ill, either in reality or in fancy. At any rate her nerves were altogether unstrung.

## CHAPTER VI.

MARGARET was not alarmed, for she had often seen her mother in the same state, and knew very well the sort of treatment that she required. But after what had passed the day before, she resolved to make her mother send the letter of introduction to Mr. Thomas' friend. Having found it, she put on her hat, and went into her mother's room.

"I am going out for a little while, mother," she said, "would you like me to leave Mr. Thomas' letter at Dr. Carl's, with a message, begging him to come and see you?"

Mrs. Willoughby's face visibly brightened, while she answered, languidly,—

"I don't think it is necessary, but do as you think best."

"Well, mamma, there would be no harm done. He might set you to rights more

quickly than we could; and you can have a chat with him about Mr. Thomas."

"I don't feel up to chatting with anyone, my dear," replied her mother, dolefully; "but if it would be any satisfaction to you, you may send the letter."

"Very well, mamma," returned Margaret, cheerfully; "I will be back before Dr. Carl comes, and it will be pleasant to have a talk with him about Mr. Thomas."

Then with a somewhat lightened heart, but with a world full of wondering thoughts and feelings exciting her strangely, she left the hotel, and set off in search of Dr. Carl. She was not long in finding the street in which he lived,—a broad steep street, leading down into the lower part of the town. Having discovered the house, delivered the letter, and heard, in answer to her message, that Dr. Carl would be at the Zähringer Hof in an hour's time, she walked on to continue her explorations.

"I will go down here," she said to herself, "and feel my way to the beautiful woman with the fountain and little boy."

But many curious and interesting corners, or points from which she gained glimpses of distant loveliness, continually kept her captive, and beguiled her from the route which she had intended to take, and many times she felt to have lost herself, and was obliged to ask to be directed. Presently she reached a small shop full of wood-carving. A pale sad face looking out of the shop-window interested her, and she determined to go in, ask her way, and buy a present for her mother.

“Is that Dr. Carl?” called out some one, anxiously, from an inner room, as she entered the shop.

“No, mother,” answered the pale girl, sadly, “not yet.”

“Have you an invalid? Is your mother ill?” asked Margaret.

“No; but my mother’s heart is breaking, because my dear little sister is ill, perhaps dying! But the good doctor has done her good already; he will cure her if the good God wills.”

“Is it Dr. Carl? Is he good to you?”

“Ah!” cried the girl, her face lighting up with enthusiasm, “he is good! He is an angel from God! He is good to all, and to none better than to us. He is as gentle as the holy sisters of mercy, who come from the nunnery to nurse us. Ah, he is kinder even than they. For the holy Virgin will reward them in heaven, for their self-denial on earth; but he,—alas, poor man, he is a heretic; and he works only that he may do us good.”

A puzzled look, half sad, half admiring, crossed her face as she spoke.

“And does he work hard?”

“He works night and day. He never spares himself. Ah, Fraulein, you should have seen him at the time of the fever! He seemed to be everywhere at once, and was always at hand when one wanted him. He was continually with my father when he was dying, and his words seemed to soothe and strengthen him like the words of the priest; or even better, if it were not sin to think so! The good priest loves him too, but he gave me a penance for saying that

to hear him speak in a sick room was as sweet as going to church for Benediction. And yet it surely is, and the Fraulein would feel it——ah, what am I saying? ” And she crossed herself, moved her lips in prayer, and recorded, mentally, another sin to be confessed to her priest.

“ But he could not save your father, dear? ”

“ Ah, no, Fraulein, the good God willed that he should die. And since then we have been sad and poor, and my little sister has been sickly, and Dr. Carl has been our good friend.”

“ And you expect him to-day? ”

“ Yes, every day. Stay,—is that his step? ”

And she eagerly went to the door to listen, while Margaret, taking up her purchase hastily, left the shop and proceeded on her way.

Suddenly, and when she was least expecting it, she came upon the picturesque corner that had made an especial impression upon her imagination. Clothes of bright-



coloured stuff were lying around the foot of the quaint old fountain, and women engaged in the occupation of washing, or ringing out, dark blue petticoats, or crimson handkerchiefs, were leaning over it, or standing near, talking and laughing together gaily. The little invalid was seated in his accustomed place, and the old grandmother, with the crimson head-dress, was murmuring and cooing soothingly by his side. The lights and shadows of a brilliant September day added to the perfections of the pretty picture, and having said her say to her little friend, finding that she had half an hour to spare, Margaret took a small block and pencil from her pocket, and prepared to sketch.

The old woman brought out a chair for her to sit upon, and while she drew, Margaret asked questions and listened with interest to stories of the sick boy and his kind doctor. Was it Dr. Carl? she asked. Yes, and did the Fraulein know the good doctor? No, the Fraulein did not know him, but she was glad to hear about him,



for she had a sick mother whom he was going to attend.

“Grandmother! grandmother!” cried the little boy, with sudden joy, “he is coming, he is coming!”

And at the same moment was heard a quick footstep, followed by the sound of a man’s voice, speaking words of greeting in a cheering tone.

“Well, and how is my little friend?” asked the new comer in German. And Margaret, looking up quickly, recognized the tall, broad-shouldered, dark-bearded man, whose kindness to the poor cripple had attracted her attention, outside the cathedral, after the Sunday Mass. Her eyes met his, and in an instant she knew them for the eyes that had haunted her sleeping and waking dreams during the past eight years.

It had been no mere vision, then, that she had seen in the cathedral! It had been a reality. And now there was a mutual, although, for the moment, silent recognition. What passed in the hearts of the two who were gazing at each other so earnestly,

during that second of silence? What would each have said to the other could the heart have spoken? A life-time of recollection seemed to pass in that moment: a life-time of hope, fear, joy, regret, tenderness, love, self-sacrifice, all mingled together in indefinite confusion, so that it would have been impossible to say what sentiment or feeling was the prevailing one.

But that moment passed, Charles Meredith approached Margaret Willoughby, and they greeted as old acquaintances, and nothing more. The recollection of the past only so far affected the manner of their meeting as to throw into it a certain degree of embarrassment. How different from the imaginary meeting which many and many a time had rehearsed itself in Margaret's mind!—that magical meeting which, with the speed of lightning, had cast down all barriers of misunderstanding, and had drawn two hearts together in a close and blissful embrace! But the imaginary meeting had been with the Charles Meredith of years ago, who had esteemed it a privilege to

be near to her, to perform an errand for her, to slave himself for her in any way, and had eagerly accepted the slightest token of her regard, or pleasure in his society, and who would have been surprised and overwhelmed with happiness by the knowledge that she had learnt to look up to him as a being deserving of all love and reverence.

The real meeting was with Dr. Carl, with whom it was her privilege to be able to claim acquaintanceship, by whose slightest notice she might feel herself honoured,—Dr. Carl, of whom Mr. Thomas had spoken to her,—Dr. Carl, the worker, thinker, writer, whose whole life was devoted to the good of others, ‘of whom the world was not worthy!’

Although, however, he had developed into this great doctor, he was simple and unpretending as the Charles Meredith of yore. But Margaret could not think of him as Charles Meredith, she could think of him only as the great doctor. And as she looked at him, and watched him stooping over the sick child, a vague dream of very

long ago seemed to have awakened into a noble reality,—a shadowy conception had been changed into an actual creation of flesh and blood. A hero answering to long ago day-dreams was before her; but she was not the heroine moving by his side, as in that old summer day-dream. She had no thought of herself, it was not her *own* hero that she had found; it was some one with whom she had nothing to do, but whom she might watch with admiration and the mere contemplation of whom seemed to raise her into a higher and better atmosphere. Something of all this she felt already; but she was to feel it more fully as her knowledge of Dr. Carl increased.

“I thought I could not be mistaken,” he said, presently, as they walked together up towards the Zähringer Hof. “I recognized you in the cathedral yesterday, only I was puzzled at seeing you alone.”

He looked into her face as he spoke, with an earnest and inquiring look, which Margaret did not understand at the time, but which she afterwards liked to remember.

“ Ah, poor mamma was ill. She is seldom well enough to go out with me, in the mornings,” she answered.

“ Yes, the letter that I have received from my friend, Mr. Thomas, has explained much to me. I am sorry that you have so much anxiety about Mrs. Willoughby.” Then they talked of how Mrs. Willoughby had borne the fatigue of travelling, of Mr. Thomas, of Fribourg and its neighbourhood and so forth.

“ This is a very busy time with you, I suppose,” said Margaret, presently. “ The hotels and pensions seem to be very full. Are there many invalids amongst the visitors ? ”

“ The visitors do not make much difference to me, Miss Willoughby,” he replied. “ I have plenty to do in my own peculiar province, and do not interfere with the other medical men. It is only at Mr. Thomas’ particular request that I break my rule, for once, and allow myself the pleasure of visiting Mrs. Willoughby.”

“ Then mamma ought to be doubly grateful to Mr. Thomas,” said Margaret.

“I don’t know as to that,” returned Dr. Carl, laughing. “You would have found Dr. Stultz and Dr. Wiesen very clever and very agreeable. And I fear the fact of my being an old friend, if I may call myself so, and a fellow-countryman, will hardly make up for their greater experience and vast ability.”

“At all events, we think that we may trust to Mr. Thomas’ recommendation,” said Margaret, smiling one of the sweetest smiles that Dr. Carl had ever set eyes upon. “And it will do my mother good to have something English about her, and—only,” she broke off suddenly, “don’t let us tell her who you are? It will be such fun to see how soon she finds out the mystery for herself.”

“Ah, I am too much changed for her to be able to make the important discovery,” he returned, laughingly, and yet with a touch of sadness in his tones. “You did not recognize me, Miss Willoughby, until I introduced myself?”

“I—yes,—at least on Sunday, at the cathedral, I had a sort of vision of you, but

it vanished, and I fancied—" She paused, embarrassed by her attempt at explanation. What would he think if he could so read her heart and mind as to know all the fancies about himself that had lived there since the moonlight evening on which she had seen him last !

"Yes, it vanished," he said, "because it had something to do that called it away. But it came back again to search through the crowd of people leaving the cathedral, for an answering vision, which it hoped might turn into a reality."

"And I had another vision of it, outside the cathedral," said Margaret.

"Had you ?"

"Yes. But I did not really think that it could be you. You were busy helping a poor old cripple at the time that I was struck with the likeness."

"Oh, ay, poor old Gretchen !"

"But I recognised you before you spoke, just now, when you came to see the little boy. Only——"

"Only you had not known of my transformation into Dr. Carl."



“No. It seemed mysterious altogether ! And you have not explained yourself yet. I don’t now understand why you are not Dr. Meredith ? ”

“Well, in the first place my Christian name was a simpler one for the Swiss peasants to translate into their own language. I had another reason, however, but other people are concerned in it, and it would not interest you.”

“And do you give all your time to the poor people ? ” asked Margaret.

“Not quite ; but they are my great interest,” replied the doctor simply.

“And they seem to worship you ! ” said Margaret.

“Poor things ! I have much to thank them for,” returned Dr. Carl.

And here the two reached the Zähringer Hof, and Margaret went to prepare her mother for the doctor’s visit.



## CHAPTER VII.

“HE is charming! quite charming! Margaret,” said Mrs. Willoughby, when Dr. Carl had left. “Such sympathy! so gentleman-like! so understanding! I have never seen a doctor that I have liked so well.”

“Not even dear Mr. Thomas, mamma?”

“I think very highly of Mr. Thomas, my love, but I have never met with any one who has shown such complete knowledge of the nervous system as Dr. Carl. And then his exceeding gentleness! It is fortunate, really, to have met with such a person so far from home. He reminds me of some one, by-the-by! Whom does he remind me of? I was puzzled by some likeness all the time that he was here. Can’t you help me, Margaret?”

“It seems to me that he is like himself and no one else, mother,” returned Mar-

garet, laughing. "But perhaps you may have seen him before, somewhere?"

"Never, my dear, never. Do you think I could have forgotten that handsome face, if I had seen it? Besides, I know I have never come across any Dr. Carl before. No, it is only a look about him of some one else that puzzles me. But you were always slow at seeing likenesses, Margaret. I have been told that a quick eye for resemblance is invariably accompanied by a highly sensitive nervous temperament."

"Well, darling mother," returned Margaret, half tenderly, half mischievously, "I wish that the highly sensitive could enjoy this privilege without having to suffer also from bad headaches!"

A martyr-like sigh was Mrs. Willoughby's answer, and as she closed her eyes, Margaret left her asleep, and went to her own room for letter-writing and other occupations, over which she fell into a brown study.

When she lay down in bed that night, it was with the sense of having lost something out of her life,—something both sweet and

sad. She no longer found herself looking back over the past years with aching longing and regretful tenderness, or forward with a secret hope. She felt regret at having parted with regret!—at having lost sight both of a thing longed for and of the wish to bring it back again. It was something like the sensation that one might have on first awakening from a midsummer night's dream,—full of strange and beautiful sights and sounds, of fantastic and wonderful lights and shadows, passionate sorrow and unnatural hope and gladness,—to the reality of a healthy summer's day, in which nothing unusual was to be found, and no unwonted mystery.

But her actual awakening, from actual dreams, the next morning, brought with it solely the sense of gladness.

“What was it? What did her pleasant recollection mean? What was about to happen? The answer to her questioning feelings was not slow in making itself heard within her mind.

“Oh, nothing,” so it ran, “only Dr. Carl is coming to-day!”

But, somehow, the thought of this “nothing,”—the visit of this Dr. Carl, this new hero, who could be nothing to her but a pleasant study,—was sufficient to knock down all remembrance of midnight regrets, and to make the September sunshine seem doubly lovely in the brilliancy of its own peculiar tint of gold.

Mrs. Willoughby’s nervous illness required attention for some time. Dr. Carl often came to see her; and his visits, cheering manner, and pleasant conversation, did her more good than medicines.

“He will cure her,” said Margaret to herself, gladly and thankfully. But she did not breathe her hopes aloud to her mother, for fear of breaking the charm which seemed now to be working so happily. Dr. Carl had freed her from anxiety; and there seemed to be nothing to prevent her enjoying, to the full, the life which had begun to move, for her, in such an easily and pleasantly flowing current. It was a life full of interest, full of thought. She cared nothing for what was to follow upon its immediate

course. She looked no longer back upon the past. The present was everything to her. And what the present meant she did not know, and did not seek to know. It was very satisfying, that was enough for her.

She was often at home when Dr. Carl called, and the few minutes' talk about Mrs. Willoughby's health generally led the way to another few minutes' talk, pleasant and interesting in itself, and leaving behind it, in Margaret's mind, suggestions for fresh thought and the sense of new life. . In short, every word, every look, of Dr. Carl's impressed her with a force which she had never felt in the days when she had known him as Charles Meredith. As Dr. Carl, he seemed to have gained a marvellous power over her. And she? Had she lost her own power? Had she lost the power by which she had fascinated him in that boy and girl period? To herself it seemed that she had. But she did not care. She only wondered that she could ever have dreamed of exercising influence over him who now seemed to her to be deserving of deepest

reverence and fullest trust. What was she? The same foolish, imperfect girl that she had been eight years before. While he!—well, she might look up to him, and feel all his kindness to be very, very delightful, and lose the sense of her own littleness in his nobility, and move freely and be glad! Sometimes he joined her when she was walking, pointed out to her the best and easiest ways, or lionized her to some interesting spot, or fine point of view. Sometimes he came across her when she was sketching, and stayed for a minute to give her an artistic hint; or, taking the brush from her hand, became absorbed for a few moments in the delight of painting. And then he would hurry away, in double quick time, to look after his sick people in the poorer parts of the town.

“I don’t believe,” thought Margaret, “that he spends a moment on himself. I don’t believe that he does a single thing for his own pleasure. He is always working, or doing some kindness to other people!”

Margaret was both right and wrong. It is true that his whole life was given up to

others, or to the pursuit of something which drew him away from himself, and had not its rise in himself. But he was no martyr. There was no effort in this self-abnegation. He was conscious of no self-denial. His spirit was in harmony with his work; and as if possessed of an 'extraordinary power of taking trouble,' he went gladly and simply about all that he had to do. Whether he was attending on the poor, which he considered his especial work and province, or studying in the things which concerned his profession, or writing articles for a foreign or English magazine, or merely paying kind attentions to a friend, his whole heart was in all that he did; and, in a manner, all that he put his heart into became his pleasure and enjoyment.

Sometimes, when he had come across Margaret in the town, he pointed out to her one or two of the characters amongst his poor people in whom he took an especial interest.

"Poor things!" said Margaret, one day, realizing for a moment how much misery was to be found even in such a town as Fribourg. "Poor things! Could not I



help? Could not I do something? I hate to be enjoying myself in this manner, when other people are miserable, or working for the miserable ones. Could not I help?"

"No," replied Dr. Carl, decisively, "indeed you could not. You must not put yourself out of your proper place, you know, Miss Willoughby!" and he laughed. "Your proper place is enjoyment now, and you must content yourself with it as best you may; for I have really nothing to give you to do."

"I suppose no one but you *could* do it," said Margaret, thoughtfully.

"I? Mine is a very small part, Miss Willoughby! I have plenty of helpers, I assure you; good priests, and sisters of mercy, in abundance. Poor things, some of them have a hard time of it! As for me, I give up nothing; it is all ease and enjoyment, and carries its own reward with it. But they,—they put me to shame! What with fasting, and praying, and working, and the fear of losing their reward, after all, life is no bed of roses for them."

"I could help the sisters to nurse," said Margaret. "I am used to sickness."

"No, no, Miss Willoughby, you have enough to do at home, too much perhaps. And we want you to take back with you as large an amount of health and strength as you can manage to carry."

A pang shot through Margaret's heart. She did not like to be reminded of her home. She did not wish to think of it. She believed she did not wish ever to go back to it any more. Dr. Carl observed the cloud on her face, and fancied that she was still distressing herself about being forced to be idle.

"So you want to rob the poor sisters of their jewels, do you?" he said. And there was such a comical look on his face, as he spoke, that Margaret burst out laughing, in spite of herself.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"Don't you know?" he returned. "Don't you know that these good creatures work for heavenly wages? Don't you know that all their privations and humiliations carry with them so much treasure in heaven?"

“I am sure you do not put it fairly,” said Margaret, gravely.

“Perhaps not,” he answered. “At any rate, I believe some of them forget all about crowns and jewels and high places in heaven, and good for their own peculiar souls, and all the rest of it, in real sympathy with the suffering which they are doing their best to cure. Sister Agnes is one of these, as gentle and angel-like a creature as you had need to see. But there are others who, like some of our strong-minded females in England, take a grim delight in misery, and believe it to have been created for their own peculiar benefit. Rob one of these of the sight of suffering fellow-creatures, and the importance of her position as worker amongst them, and you rob her of all that makes life worth having, of all the honour and glory which makes her ideal of heavenly bliss. Sister Catharine, for instance! Would you like to see her?”

“Is she anywhere near?” asked Margaret, looking round for a second, and then up into Dr. Carl’s face.

For answer, he suddenly drew down his lips into grim severity, turned up his eyes, threw an air of defiance and importance into his countenance, clasped his hands tightly together, as though in the grasp of some imaginary treasure, and, with the aid of other movements and gestures, contrived, as a whole, in some mysterious manner, to bring before Margaret's eyes a woman in complete nun's costume. The effect was irresistible, and Margaret once more burst out laughing.

"I have seen her!" she cried. "I am sure I saw her one day, going into one of the cottages. What a shame, Dr. Carl! Poor thing! I thought she looked very good, but very unhappy!"

"As to that, she is as happy as a miser who is reflecting on his hoards of gold, and as unhappy as a miser who is in terror of being robbed. To see her in perfection, however, you should be present when she comes into contact with the heretic doctor on his way to cure a patient who makes one of her favourite cases of misery!"

“For shame, Dr. Carl,” said Margaret, laughing. “I did not know that your Protestant prejudices were so strong!”

“I think, however,” replied Dr. Carl, “that I might be able to show you Sister Catharine’s portrait amongst Protestant district-visitors in England, and I hope that we might find some of the Sister Agnes type amongst them also.”

“I am glad you give some credit to sister Agnes,” said Margaret, “for otherwise I should have said that you divided the people who give themselves up to doing good into two classes, those who do it for the sake of a heavenly crown, and those who do it for the sake of earthly honour and praise.” Then, changing her tone, “I wish you would not spoil my fancies, Dr. Carl,” she said, “I like to think of nuns as something very pure and unworldly. And surely some of them really so give up outward things as to realize the unseen in a peculiar manner, and be perfectly satisfied with the One Whom they have chosen instead of any other, to be——”

Margaret paused abruptly. Her voice had been nervously husky whilst speaking; for she was unaccustomed to the expression of her innermost sacred thoughts and feelings, and now, moreover, there had suddenly come over her a dim consciousness that she was approaching dangerous ground. Dr. Carl was looking at her earnestly; she felt as if his eyes had power to pierce their way through and gaze into her heart, and her own drooped, while he began to speak.

“You mean,” he said, and his tones were low and tender, “you think,”—perhaps he, too, was sensible that some invisible hand was drawing him on to dangerous ground. At any rate he stopped short for a moment, and when he spoke again it was in his more usual tone of voice. “You think, Miss Willoughby, that by giving up earthly ties a person becomes purer, and gains a surer hold on the unseen realities? I do not agree with you. It is as much as to say that by being unnatural we rise into the higher life, or ‘become spiritual,’ as people

express it! But I am sorry to have disturbed your fancies, and, after all, perhaps they are to some extent true, truer than the words that have disturbed them. Yes, I believe that the secret of many of these good sisters' satisfaction is to be found in something closer, and in something less cold and selfish, than the hope of a future everlasting glory! And *I*, at any rate, might well envy them their purity and faithful devotion."

"You!" cried Margaret, almost involuntarily; and as she looked at his face, while he stood for a moment in a musing attitude, it seemed to her that the quiet light with which it shone was expressing the sympathy existing between himself and those pure and simple souls of whom he was thinking.

"We must add a third class, Miss Willoughby," he said, presently, looking up with a smile,—“we must add a third class to the two which you lay at my door,—and must make it up of those who do what they do simply because it pleases and



interests them to do it. And I am afraid that you see one of those good-for-nothing fellows before you now! The division will be perfect then, and this last class is the worst of all!"

"But you don't do it only to please yourself!"

"Don't I, Miss Willoughby? What do I do it for? It interests and satisfies me, as nothing else would."

"What made you take to it first?" asked Margaret, diffidently.

"Ah, that is a long story," replied Dr. Carl, an expression of pain crossing his face, followed by a look,—*that* look in his eyes,—which Margaret knew by heart. "Well," he added, musingly, "I believe it would have seemed lonely work at times, if I had not had an unseen Companion to walk by my side, and work with me. I believe I should have found it a hard matter to live once, if some One had not called me to work for Him, and showed me that life did not simply mean the fulfilment of all one's passionate desires."

It almost seemed to Margaret, as she looked and listened, as though she were in the presence of one of the seers and saints of old. And, in truth, he with whom she was talking *was* a seer into the Immortal World, was one who had heard and obeyed a call from heaven. Presently, looking at her with his own peculiar, bright smile,—such a delightful smile as had sent mental warmth and radiance into many a heart besides her own,—“Some day, Miss Willoughby,” he said, “I will reply to that question of yours, if you have patience to listen to my egoism. But now that we have reached a good point of view for the sketch, I am afraid I ought to leave you, so ‘good-bye’ for the present.” But he was not gone yet; gazing with sudden wistfulness into her face, “You little know, Miss Willoughby,” he added, “how very much I have to thank you for!” And, hardly giving her time for a word or a look in reply, he left her abruptly. She gazed after him as he wound his way along the rough path that led back into the poor

streets, where many sick people were anxiously expecting him. She gazed after him,—her heart beating quickly, and her eyes half filled with tears,—she gazed after him, until he was out of sight. What did she feel? Was it pain, or was it gladness? She could not have said. She only knew that her spirit had been very near to his, and that the half hour that she had spent with him had been to her a sort of heaven upon earth. The time had passed; but the heaven was living. The heaven would live for ever! So she felt, and mused, and thought, looking idly at the view before her; until, with the sudden recollection that he would ask to see her sketch, she took out her pencil and began to draw.

## CHAPTER VIII.

“DR. Carl, my mother desires me to tell you that we are going for a long drive to-day, and she would be so glad if you would kindly come with us, as lionizer. She forgot it when you were with her just now, and has sent me after you. Will you come? We are to take luncheon with us, and make a regular excursion of it.”

It was a lovely day, clear and fresh ; just the day to make an expedition, with pleasant companions, thoroughly enjoyable. Slowly and reluctantly came Dr. Carl's answer to Margaret's invitation.

I should like nothing better, Miss Willoughby ; but,—I am afraid it is out of the question. I am very busy to-day. Please thank Mrs. Willoughby very much for her kindness in asking me.”

“Would not your sick people spare you for one day?”

“Not this day, I fear. There are some important cases that must be attended to this afternoon.”

“Well! I suppose it is what you like best; you told me, the other day, that whatever you did, you did to please yourself!”

Dr. Carl laughed. “Did I?” he said, —“did I say so? And you are bent on making mischief between me and my poor friends! You are determined to make me feel that there is another way in which I might please myself better? Do you know, Miss Willoughby,” he went on, while his face softened, and grew pitifully tender, “that one poor fellow whom I am going to see is very near his end; I can do nothing for him, except perhaps soothe, to some slight extent, the painfulness of his last hours. But I believe that he would leave earth with a sorer heart if I were not with him to the last. He is a poor priest, poorer perhaps than the poorest of those to whom he used to minister, and more lonely. He

gave away all he had to the poor, fasted and prayed, and,—in short he has unconsciously been committing suicide for the last ten years, and many a time I have dinned warnings into his deaf ears! But his life has been a noble sacrifice, and we selfish ones might well wish that our last end might be like his.”

Margaret’s eyes filled with tears.

“Of course you cannot leave him,” she said.

Then with a sudden impulse, looking up into his face, she added, wistfully, “But I am afraid that you are killing yourself after the same fashion. You never allow yourself any rest!”

Margaret’s gentle tones and words were like a draught of new health and strength to Dr. Carl. He thanked her with a look, the tenderness of which could not be expressed in words, and then said,—

“You don’t know what strong stuff I am made of, physically, Miss Willoughby. You don’t know what actual enjoyment I find in my work. You don’t know, either, how

many times, by day or by night, I please myself, as you express it, by taking a stretcher up above the town, or how many pipes I solace myself with, when I consider myself to require solace. But you *do* know that I have been taking my rest in this paradise outside the Zähringer Hof, all these minutes that you have chosen to beguile me, and that I ought to be off now in double quick time. Good-bye ! Perhaps, however, we may meet again, if you are not very late, or very much tired, when you return from your drive, and if I am not too much pressed by my work to take my chance of stumbling across you ? ”

The expedition was enjoyed, for Margaret's thoughts were happy, and her mother was unusually bright and well. Moreover, the lovely scenery through which their road lay made a pleasant background for happy fancies. Fribourg itself, from the farther bridge, was a striking sight to look down upon. It appeared to Margaret to be a kind of ideal city, so peculiar was the beauty of its situation and of its surroundings, and



the manner in which its quaint buildings and picturesque ups and downs blended, as a whole, into loveliness. But as they crossed the bridge, its planks seemed to shake and quiver in answer to Mrs. Willoughby's trembling nerves; and Margaret found it very necessary, both in going and returning, to talk fast and fluently, in gay or rapturous excitement, in order that she might divert her mother's mind from the fear of being precipitated into the awful depths below. So as she glanced first at one side, and then at the other, where the gorge of the gorteron stood folding together its seemingly endless layers of beauty, it was to Margaret like the hasty reading of a glorious poem, which you know to contain depths of beauty that you have not yet attempted to fathom.

It was pleasant at the end of the successful excursion to find that they had returned too late for *table d'hôte*, and yet not too late for an evening stroll; and after a privately improvised tea in Mrs. Willoughby's room, Margaret was free to set out on her lonely pilgrimage. She walked slowly

across the first bridge, stopping to look down into the river, and at its reflections from the sunset sky, and to muse, and to feel, and to say to herself, as she had often said before,—

“How lovely! How strange! How full of wonderful stories!”

But soon she quickened her footsteps, for she had set her heart upon reaching the more distant bridge, that she might read again from it the poem which she had already read many times, but which she felt had now fresh things to speak of to her heart.

At last she was there! At last she was there, in the luxury of leisure, peace, and quietness! And leaning against the side of the bridge, feasting her eyes upon the strange and beautiful view, backed at the moment by a glorious sunset sky, she gave herself up to delicious reverie.

She turned over and over again in her mind words which had been lately spoken to her. She repeated them softly to herself, mimicking the very tones in which they had

been said. And while twilight gradually crept over the city below, and the glowing colours of the western sky faded one by one, or seemed to blend together until they had formed a broad luminous belt of pale gold, fringed by a line of deepest purple, a thousand recollections, thoughts, and feelings, turned Margaret's mind into a world full of stormy delight. She was sure of her joy. She hugged it to herself. She hugged it again, to make sure that she was sure. And when once more she hugged it, as though in fear lest something should come to rob her of her treasure, it seemed too great, too strange, too wonderful to last, it seemed so excessive as to be almost pain. She even longed to be able to still it for an instant into peace. And she almost welcomed the vague sense of sadness which, by degrees, stole, like twilight, through the atmosphere of her bliss. It was a tender sadness, speaking vaguely of the past and future, but seeming to hallow present joy, and to make it dearer than before. She thought of little Jack. She thought of old nurse. She

thought of death. She thought of resurrection and of hidden life. And with a rush of recollection, old nurse's death-song suddenly came back to her mind.

“Promises, marriage, death! Promises, death, marriage!” What did it mean? The recollection and the wonderment were followed by distasteful memories, thoughts, and fears. So the twilight of a gentle sadness deepened into the gloom of dull despondency and dark foreboding. And with the sense of something lost, she was about to leave her place of reverie, and hasten homewards, when the sound of a footstep close behind her, accompanied by the exclamation in a soft voice of, “Miss Willoughby!” startled her once more into paradise.

## CHAPTER IX.

“You here at this time of night!” said Dr. Carl, smiling, as they clasped hands. “You out at this hour, sacred to bats and owls, smokers and the early stars!”

“Actually, there is a star!” answered Margaret, with an ashamed laugh. “I did not find out how late it was getting! Mamma will be wondering what has become of me. Have you only just got away from your work, Dr. Carl?”

“No,—we have had a long walk, my friend and I,” and he touched the pipe which he had just taken out of his mouth, and was preparing to put away into its resting-place. “We had so much to say to each other that I was beguiled into going farther than I had intended.”

“Along the road beyond this bridge?”

“Yes. I thought I might have met your returning carriage, and have asked Mrs. Willoughby to give me a seat. But having wandered into byways and woods, I presently caught sight of the carriage from far away. It was useless attempting to fall in with it, but I took what I imagined to be a short cut, with the usual success. However, I might have done worse than arrive at the end of my walk at the present moment.”

“And how are all your poor people? How did you find the poor priest?”

“Ah!” was the answer. “Ah, poor fellow!” A shadow came over Dr. Carl’s face, a shadow that was pitiful, sad and tender! “We need not talk of that, Miss Willoughby. Tell me——”

“But please let us talk about it,” interrupted Margaret, wistfully, “if you don’t mind!” “Did he suffer very much? Was it very dreadful? It could not be, though, as he was so very good.”

“I have stood by scores of deathbeds,” answered Dr. Carl, “but I have never been

by one that affected me in the same manner as this one. It was most pathetic and pitiful, and yet most glorious! Glorious seems to be the only word—I use it because I cannot help myself! Utterly lonely,—except as regards the priest in attendance and myself,—lonely, weak, suffering,—in a manner that it was distressing to witness,—the memory of kith and kin, of parents, and brothers, and sisters, whose love he knew long ago, must have been over him, for with heart-rending cries he called them as he dozed. But when he awoke he smiled,—Miss Willoughby, that smile will haunt me to my dying day, he smiled, and I felt that he was smiling at the recognition of that Unseen Companion, of whom we were speaking the other day! And then all at once,—I am not superstitious, but I assure you, Miss Willoughby, it seemed to me as if the room had been illuminated with a sudden radiance,—and in that moment he passed away!”

There was silence for a few moments, while the two stood gazing at the western



horizon, where the sunset glow still lingered in pale gold, belting the darkening sky. And then Margaret said gently,—

“It reminds me of my old nurse’s death, and of little Jack!”

“Little Jack?” repeated Dr. Carl. “Do you mean a small sick child that I remember,—how many thousand years ago? Miss Willoughby, you have suddenly transported me to the last stage of my existence!”

“You remember little Jack, then?” said Margaret. “I have always meant to tell you about him, but——”

“*But*,” she might have gone on, “something has always kept us from touching on any subject connected with that long ago time when we were together at Grantham.”

In truth, those bygone days had been to them as forbidden ground on which they might not tread. Was it that the ground was so sacred that they felt to touch it would be sacrilege? Or was it that they feared some lurking evil in the past, which might destroy the purity of their present “Heaven of blue?”

"But," Margaret continued, "I did not know whether you would remember him. He was very, very fond of you. Whenever I went to see him he used to talk of you, and he always asked me when you were coming back."

She paused, but Dr. Carl remained silent, and she did not understand the meaning of the look with which he answered her. Only, she felt that her words had somehow moved him much, and it seemed as if he were silently asking some question which he could not frame into words.

"And when he was dying," she went on——

"He died, then?" put in Dr. Carl. "Poor little fellow, I remember him well, with his little wistful face! And do you think, Miss Willoughby, that I could forget anything connected with the days that I spent at Grantham?"

The question was added in such a very low tone that Margaret rather *felt* than heard it asked.

"He died," she continued, in a trembling

voice, "and he carried away with him the hope that he should find you in the Home to which he was going!"

"Perhaps," said Dr. Carl, "perhaps he did find me, although not 'behind the veil.' Perhaps he travelled near to me, and has been often near to me, since, with a message from Grantham, which I have been too dull to understand. Would it have come to me as a message of forgiveness, if I could have heard and understood it rightly?"

This question, also, was spoken in so low and soft an undertone that it hardly could have conveyed its sense to Margaret's mind through the medium of her natural ear alone. Surely now had arrived the moment which she had rehearsed in her mind so often! Surely now was granted to her the opportunity for which she had often longed! Surely now had arrived the season of explanation, when, without seeming to ask him still to love her, she yet might let him perceive that she knew herself to have been blind, stupid, conceited, rude and abrupt? Something of all this flitted instantaneously

through her brain, while she stood there dumb before him.

Perhaps he read in her upturned face all, and more than all, that she would if she could have put into words! Perhaps his heart, reading hers, told him that now he might speak without doubt or fear, that the hour was now come, the hour for which he had waited, hoped, and watched! Perhaps a question which he had long been silently asking, had now at length been silently answered! Perhaps he felt certain now, at last, that the fruit of love was ripe, and might be safely gathered. Be this as it may, apparent impossibilities, recollections of rebuffs, of dark words, of discouraging letters, and of news that had seemed like bitter truth,—resolutions, determinations, doubts, fears,—all in a moment vanished, like a cloud under the influence of sunshine, and a tale of love, both new and old, came pouring forth from his lips. But who could dare to tell again, for the benefit of other ears than hers, this tale of love? And for her answer,—I scarcely know whether or

not she was able to frame it into words. I only know that it brought to his heart a full and definite assurance that all for which he asked was his.

But of the blissful moments that followed, who, again, would dare, if he could, to tell the tale? It was a time sacred to themselves. It was a time in which a monosyllable, a look, a touch, expressed what could not be put into a volume. It was a minute in which a lifetime of blissful love was experienced, yet which seemed to pass with the speed of its sixtieth part! It passed into another minute, and then that other likewise passed away! One after another the minutes sped with the rapidity of a swiftly-flowing river, and while the sky, the stars, the dying light in the west, the reflections in the gotteron, the city, mysterious in the deepening shadows, yet brilliant with its newly lighted lamps,—and all that formed the strange and beautiful scene around them,—seemed to be repeating again the tale that had been told, and all that had been said and thought, and

while the very atmosphere appeared to be breathing again the love which they were living,—those two on the bridge forgot that time, too, was not standing still, side by side with them, to listen and to feel and breathe. They forgot, in short, everything but their own love and their own bliss !

The spell was rudely broken.

## CHAPTER X.

“MISS MARGARET! I declare I could hardly believe my eyes! Oh, miss, what a fright you’ve give us, to be sure! And to think that you’re not drowned, nor run away with, nor nothing, after all! Your mamma ’ll never get over it, never!”

Like a volley of shots suddenly disturbing a peaceful atmosphere, Jane’s severely and pantingly-spoken flow of words came pouring down upon the hearing of the two, who, for a short season, had forgotten the sound of any tones more harsh than their own. It startled them effectually, and for an instant they looked at each other dumbly, with something like a smile of amused dismay.

But Margaret speedily broke the silence with a ringing peal of laughter.

“Do you really think that mamma will



never get over my not having been drowned, Jane?" she said, as with one consent she and her companions began the homeward walk. "Because, if that is the case, it might be as well for you to throw me over the bridge at once, and then carry back the joyful news to mamma."

"It is all very well for them to laugh as don't care about their sick mamma, Miss Margaret, but them that loves her find it as much as they can do not to break their hearts. And she so neglected, poor dear, and so lonely, and wanting her supper, and down in the hysterics, and all,—what salts and *eau-de-cologne* nor nothing won't bring her round!"

"Was she really very much frightened?" asked Margaret, becoming grave. "Poor mamma! I hoped she would have been resting all this time, and would have forgotten about me."

"Ah, she knows and thinks about more things than you are aware of, Miss Margaret, and other eyes are open besides her's," replied Jane, with a severely-know-

ing, not to say impudent, glance at the two beside her.

“Would not the best plan be for you to hurry home and relieve Mrs. Willoughby’s fears?” said Dr. Carl. “Tell her, if you please, that I am taking care of Miss Willoughby, and that she will explain what has made her so late, when she gets home. She is too much tired to hurry, so we will follow more leisurely.”

“Tell mamma I am so sorry, and don’t let her wait for me, if she wants her coffee,” said Margaret. “Oh, thank you for ridding us of her!” she added, as the woman left them. “But I am not a bit tired. I should like to go for a long walk.”

“We must turn this into as long an one as you think we may,” returned Dr. Carl, “and make the most of it; for we have much to say to each other,—and who knows when we may have another opportunity? Margaret, what will Mrs. Willoughby say?”

“Margaret!” never before had Margaret heard her Christian name spoken in a tone

so soft and endearing; and on uttering it, Dr. Carl had drawn her a little closer to himself, in a manner that had seemed to say, "You are mine, my own Margaret, no one shall separate us."

"Oh, mamma will be glad; she must be glad! How can she help being glad?" answered Margaret. "You know how much she likes you. I think she almost loves you already. It will be all right. It must be all right."

But even amidst the glad and loving tremblings of the voice with which Margaret expressed her certainty, Dr. Carl discerned an undertone of doubt and fear.

"We will try to make it all right," he said, cheerily. "We will try to make Mrs. Willoughby as kind and indulgent to Charles Meredith as she has been to Dr. Carl. Will she forgive us for having deceived her all this time?" he asked, with a laugh.

Margaret did not echo the laugh.

"Oh, she can't look upon it as deceit," she answered, with the merest touch of doubt in her mind. "We only kept the

secret for fun, and because—just because it did not seem possible to divulge it before. But oh, I have so much to tell you, so much to explain,—about Miles; perhaps you will be angry, perhaps I ought to have told you before. But I was so happy just now, that I entirely forgot it, and, besides, it is really nothing.”

Then she told the story of her conditional engagement to Miles.

He was rather grave after hearing it; and it did not appear to him so light and unimportant a matter as she had seemed to think it. But the tenderness of his manner was rather deepened than otherwise.

“It was wicked, and foolish, and weak,” she went on; “I see it now. But I did it for mamma’s sake. And oh, you don’t know how miserable it all was! I feared such dreadful things for mamma, and I had no right to think—I mean I did not know that there was any one but me to care, and, and——”

Here a sob came into her voice and choked her utterance, while a caressing

touch from Dr. Carl's hand stayed her from attempting farther explanation or apology.

"My darling!" he said, in his lowest tones, "my darling! and you were so miserable, while I was dreaming that you were bright and happy, with scarcely a thought to grieve and trouble you?"

She looked up at him wonderingly.

"And why," she faltered, "why—" What would she have said? She hardly knew. "Why did you not find out? Why did you not come to see? Why did you not come in time to save me from my misery? Then all might have been explained, and we might have been happy long ago!" Somewhat after this fashion Dr. Carl interpreted her fragmentary question.

"I was a fool," he answered, "to be so easily taken in, so easily satisfied! I believed that only my own happiness was at stake; that the blessing of your life was secure, independently of my existence. During the years that had passed since I

had seen you, I had been learning, as I fancied, to be content that it should be so. But yet when the news that seemed so certain reached me, there was that about it that made the blow seem doubly crushing. I—*you* could not know what those days were to me, my Margaret, I would not have you know! God forgive me, the devil seemed nearer to me for a while than He seemed!” He paused abruptly.

Margaret’s eyes, full of loving sympathy, were raised to his.

“But I want to know all about you,” she said. “I want to know all that you have been doing through the many years that we have been separated. Tell me all that you promised to tell me the other day. Tell me everything. Tell me about that night. Tell me why you went away in such a hurry, never so much as coming to say good-bye! Had I made you hate me?”

In a little child’s tone, half caressingly, half plaintively, she said the last words, and with a smile on her lips, and in her shining eyes, that was in itself an answer to her

question. It was like a little child who cuddles itself into its mother's arms and asks for the love which it knows it has already. It was well for Dr. Carl that the duskiness of evening had increased, and that the few straggling passers-by were too much engaged with their own affairs to be observant of the manner in which he answered Margaret's question.

"Now tell me," she said again.

So he took her back with him into the bitter past, and by means of her presence turned it into sweetness. He told her of his feelings after Miles Grantham's interruption of the *tête-à-tête*, of the effect which her words had had upon him, of his mental conflicts, of his high resolves. He talked of his determination to see her once again that night, of his despair because everything seemed to conspire against this meeting, of his hope and disappointment, and, finally, of his encounter with Miles in the wood, and the conversation that had followed upon it.

He persuaded me that he loved you with a love which had been growing with the years of his life,—a love, he said, beside which



mine was a mere sentiment, a feeble newborn thing which might easily be strangled in its birth! Something at the bottom of my heart gave him the lie; but for your sake I tried to listen fairly; I tried to stifle the fierce passion of jealousy which rose up, and seemed as if it would deprive me of all power of calm judgment, of all justice and generosity. For he went on to tell me in his plausible way,—you know how plausible he can be? ”

“ I know,” replied Margaret, bitterly, the intensity of the love that she was experiencing deepening by contrast the intensity of the abhorrence with which she regarded Miles Grantham,—“ I know,” she said, “ that he has a way which you may call plausible, but which has the effect of making the most indifferent matter seem odious to me if he is arguing in its favour, and of making me feel that anything which he is calling truth must most certainly be a lie.”

“ And yet,” resumed Dr. Carl, “ he took me in, he made me believe in him, when he went on to tell me that he had reason to

know that you were learning to love him, that he had almost conquered your heart, that he had a good hope that even then, although unconsciously, you loved him as you loved no other! He talked of your mother's wishes, of the darling plan that had been formed between her and your friends at the Hall, of the peace and happiness which I should disturb, if I were to press my suit and try to steal your heart from him. I hated him as he talked, but I despised myself for hating him. I told myself that his words were right and fair, and that my jealous hearing blackened their sense as it reached me. I distrusted him, but I distrusted even more my own motives for distrust. And then he pretended to be so generous! He did not wish to quench my hopes, he said. He did not want to let his hopes come in the way of mine. It was quite possible, he was ready to allow, that your love might be for me, not him, and he wished to give me every fair chance. But as a friend, as one who had my interest at heart, he strongly urged my making

some pretext for leaving your neighbourhood at once. It would try the strength of my feelings, and it would teach you to know your own mind. It need not be for long, and I might trust him,—surely I would trust him? He loved you so well that he would consider your happiness before his own; my own love might teach me this, ‘if it was a real love!’ He promised to write to me, to tell me all about you, to act fairly by me, even to do all that he could, except, he said, conquer his own love, to help me.”

“Ah,” interrupted Margaret, in a tone of triumph, “when mamma hears all this about him, and finds out how much she has been mistaken in him, how thankful she will be that the engagement was only conditional!”

“Alas,” thought Dr. Carl, “it will be only my word against his!”

But he kept his fears to himself and went on,—

“He wrung my hand, and expressed himself in such a frank and cordial manner, and appeared to be so really kind, that even in

the midst of my misery I told myself that I was a beast for the gruff and ungracious way in which I received his kindness, and I went away believing that my antipathy towards him was only the result of jealousy. What right had I to doubt him? Apparently he was a man respected and honoured by those who knew him best. I had never heard a word said against him. I assured myself that he was conscientious, honourable,—made of far worthier stuff than I was myself, and that his only fault was his love for you,—‘only,’ I thought, ‘is it possible that he can be *her* ideal?’ ”

Here Dr. Carl paused for a moment in his narrative.

“So you believed him and went?” said Margaret, meanwhile, in a tone half musing, half wondering. “And it did not strike you to think that I might be wretched, that I might be longing to unsay things that I had said that night! You did not guess that I might be longing to see you, to make all right!—that weary, endless-seeming day! How did I live through it, I wonder?”

“Did it seem long and weary, my poor darling?” How eagerly she drank in the tender looks and words and tones with which he answered her. “Did you really miss me? Did you love me even then?”

“Did I? I wonder!” she returned. “It seems to me that I must have loved you always. But it must have been a very little love compared with *this*; or how could I have lived those eight long years without you? If we were to be parted now, and I had to go through the same weariness without you, I should die; I could not live without you through those long dreary years again!”

An aching pain was at Dr. Carl’s heart as he gazed at the tender and sensitive face, and slight girlish figure beside him.

“And yet, how brave she has been through it all,” he thought. “How bravely she has struggled! She would struggle bravely still, but that noble and unselfish heart of hers would break before it had fought its way through many years of severe suffering.”

But all his pain was kept to himself. He

was determined that at least she should feel the shelter and support of his strong love while he might be with her.

“Well, we are together now!” he answered, clasping her little hand tightly in his own big one.

“Yes,” said Margaret, with a sigh of satisfaction.

“But tell me more,” she added, after an instant’s silence. “I have not yet heard why you did not come back again.”

“Well, I received letters from him. They were fairly worded. They did not seem to be making out a case, There was no reason why I should doubt what he told me, and, from all he said of you and others, I gathered that I should not be welcome at Grantham. And yet, despite this, in my very despair I had just made up my mind to run down and see for myself, and at least look at you once more, before saying ‘good-bye’ for ever to my hopes of happiness, when a letter from Sir John Grantham came to put an end to all my faint lingering hopes, and to fill my cup of bitterness to the full!”

“A letter from Sir John Grantham!” broke in Margaret. “But surely, surely, you must have mistaken, must——”

“Impossible! It was short, definite, and severe. There was no mistaking it.”

“But what did he say?” asked Margaret, in amazement; after which she went on quietly to tell of Sir John Grantham’s kindness to her, one particular day; of his vexation with Lady Grantham for not having shown her Charles Meredith’s letter, containing messages to The Cottage, before answering it; of his hastening away to write a friendly and cordial letter, with return messages from The Cottage; of how he had repeated to her certain passages from this letter afterwards; of her daily hopes and continued disappointment!

“And you continued to trust me, in spite of appearances!” exclaimed Dr. Carl.

“I did not know what to think,” said Margaret; “but I was certain that you could not be untrue or uncourteous, and I felt convinced that there had been foul play somewhere.”



“You suspected Miles Grantham?”

“Vaguely,—I hardly know of what. Only, I felt sure that he was somehow at the bottom of the cruel disappointment that had come to me. But ——”

“Now,” put in Dr. Carl, his face looking very stern as he spoke, “you suspect what I suspect, that Miles must have destroyed the real letter, and have forged the one which I received?”

“Mamma will hear of this, and Sir John and Lady Grantham will hear of it!” was Margaret’s only answer, while her memory ran quickly over the incidents of the afternoon on which Sir John’s letter had been written.

“It is strange,—it seems almost incomprehensible that I should not have suspected that fellow at once. How could one have looked at that face,—I always detested it,—and not believe him to be capable of everything mean and base? It seems strange that I could have supposed it possible that that letter signed John Grantham could have been a *bona fide* one! And yet it was

so cunningly done that I actually seemed to hear the fine old fellow saying every word of it! He spoke of you as though you were almost his adopted daughter, said that he was well aware of your sentiments, that he had become aware of mine towards you, and considered it to be his duty to tell me that an engagement between you and Miles had long been almost an understood thing, and for my own sake, as well as yours, he ventured to recommend that I should not at present revisit the neighbourhood of Grantham. ‘There’s an end of it then!’ I said to myself. What more I said, what wicked things I felt, I would not have you know.”

He paused. They had by this time got back to the first bridge, and were lingering at one side, as Margaret had lingered by herself, on starting for her walk. They stood gazing down into the river, in which stars and a bit of deep purple sky were reflected.

“Were you very miserable?” said Margaret, raising her face to his, and feeling,

with a touch of remorse, that she had been the cause of his misery. "And did you resolve that you would never see me or think of me more?"

"I was in hell!" he replied, with sudden realization of what his agony had been. "For it seemed to me that I was shut out of all created and uncreated good, and I was full of bitterness and wrath. But I saw you, with my mind's eye, far away, looking good, and pure, and beautiful, and I felt that, amidst my misery, I should always think of you, and should always see you thus, far out of my reach as a star, and always seeming to mock me by your purity and brightness."

"How could that be when you were good, and I was not worthy of all your thought and sorrow?" returned Margaret. "Besides, at that very time how much I was thinking of you, and——"

"And praying for me," he said, as she hesitated. "I think your prayers must have been answered. I know,—it was no dream,—that Some One came to me even in my hell,

that Some One must have been by my side, as I wandered despairingly from one wretched street to another; I believe that a Guide was with me all the time."

Once more he paused abruptly, and when Margaret looked up at him, there was the look,—that wonderful look of inspiration,—which had haunted her for so many years.

They had left the bridge, and were moving leisurely towards the Zähringer Hof; and when next he spoke, it was to say,—

"Here we are at your door. Must I leave you now? or——"

"I suppose I ought to go in, for mamma will be wondering," she returned, with a regretful sigh. "But you will come too?"

"If you think that I shall not be a bore to her? Do you think that we may tell her to-night?"

"Oh, not this evening, do you think? It would excite her and give her a bad night. It will be better to wait until to-morrow."

"You are right, it will be better," returned Dr. Carl.

And although they were innocent of all

thought of deceit, it was with a sense of relief that they came to the conclusion that it would be best to leave Mrs. Willoughby in ignorance for one more night. It was with a sense of gladness that they felt that they had left themselves free to meet once more alone, before the die was cast.

“But you will come in?” said Margaret again.

So they went together into the court where Mrs. Willoughby was seated, wrapped up in a thick shawl, and impatiently awaiting Margaret’s return.

## CHAPTER XI.

“My dear Margaret, what have you and Dr. Carl been about all this time? I was beginning to feel quite nervous, until Jane brought me word that you were safe. Did you go off for a longer walk after that?” asked Mrs. Willoughby, in a slightly ag-grieved tone of voice.

“Oh no, mother, but— Have we been very long?”

It must be confessed that Margaret’s attempts at explanation were rather vague, and left a good deal to the imagination. But Dr. Carl opportunely turned on such a pleasant flow of good humour as served to cover her confusion.

“I am afraid I am to blame, Mrs. Willoughby,” he said, presently. “I found Miss Willoughby worshipping the view from the farther bridge, and——”

“Oh, there was such a lovely sunset sky,” put in Margaret.

“And instead of advising her to come home,” went on Dr. Carl, “I was guilty of lingering to look on myself, and,—in short it was such a glorious evening that we forgot ourselves. The place was certainly looking unusually beautiful.” And then he showed so much concern at having caused her uneasiness, and was so judicious in his expressions of hope that she might not suffer from the day’s fatigue and anxiety, that Mrs. Willoughby’s face, which had at first not worn its most pleasing aspect, was soon all smiles and languid contentment. She forgot her annoyance, invited Dr. Carl to remain for the evening, enjoyed his society, and wondered what in the world would have become of her if she had come to Fribourg without Mr. Thomas’ letter of introduction. Once or twice, however, the thought crossed her mind,—

“It is perhaps as well that Margaret is engaged! Girls are so silly, that there might possibly, otherwise, have been some



reason for listening to Jane's foolish fears and cautions. This intimacy with Dr. Carl might have become dangerous! As it is, I dare say he has fallen in love with her, like all the rest of them. She is certainly a very pretty girl. He thinks her like me."

By-and-by, after the party had been into the *salle-à-manger* for coffee, Mrs. Willoughby's chair was surrounded by many of her new acquaintances. She knew how to be agreeable in society, and had contrived to make herself an object of attraction and interest in the hotel. And soon she was chattering away so fast in French to her neighbours, that Dr. Carl and Margaret found it easy to slip away, without any appearance of rudeness or neglect.

Again, for a precious few minutes, they were star-gazing together.

"Tell me more," said Margaret, "about that dreadful day when you were wandering through the streets? Was it in London?"

"Yes, in London. I wandered on and on, scarcely knowing where I was going or what I was doing, just letting my thoughts, and

they were bitter enough, carry me away with them. I found myself in some of the most horrible corners of the poorest parts of the east end of London, seeing terrible sights, hearing heart-rending cries and blasphemous words ; and as I hurried along, not staying to heed the misery, only feeling that it was in keeping with all that was going on in my own mind, something, I cannot tell what, brought vividly to my recollection your looks and words on my last night at Grantham, and made me pause to observe more closely the dreadful scene in which I found myself. *Dreadful* but lightly expresses the horror of the picture which impressed itself on my mind that day. For I had been little used to scenes of misery then, and had hardly imagined anything so horrible as the ghastly and revolting forms of disease which everywhere met my eye, and in the midst of which I suddenly realized my own utter powerlessness to aid ! And even when I heard a little pinched-up child's piteous cry, while its brutally drunken mother pushed it away from her with an oath, what was I to do ?

Or when a sickly girl, leaning against the door of a wretched house, raised her pathetic eyes appealingly to mine, what was I to do? Those eyes reminded me of other eyes,—eyes which I thought then I was perhaps never to see again!”

Dr. Carl paused for a moment to gaze fondly into the dear eyes which at the moment were lifted up to his, and then continued,—

“And in my excited state of mind I fancied your eyes looking on in reproving sadness, and your voice calling upon me to be earnest, to do something to relieve the distress around me. I was like one in a nightmare, who hears a call without being able to obey it. But all at once it seemed to me that my own grief was exaggerated into the grief of all the world; and I cried out,—it seems to me that I must have cried aloud,—at all events, without any cant or nonsense, my heart cried out for help. Do you know, Margaret, it almost seems to me as if that was the first time that I had ever really prayed! At all events, I can never forget

the thrill with which I discovered that the God Whom I had been calling upon as though He were far away, was close to me, had been close to me always. To my loud cry there came an answer in a 'still small Voice,' Which was so soft and sweet that It charmed away all my bitterness; and Which, in Its gentleness, seemed to bring me power. It told me, *He* told me, to be patient, and brave, and earnest, and called upon me to spend my life in helping others. You know that I am telling you what really happened, and not only a dream, which came to nothing, and so you can understand now how much I have to thank *you* for!"

"Me!" cried Margaret.

"Yes. Is not *this* better than if all had happened according to my wishes that night, than if you had accepted me, and had given me no home-thrust, and I had gone on happily skimming the surface of life to the end of all things?"

Margaret made no reply; she only hung her head ashamed. For an instant she compared her own petty life with his noble one,

and felt to be bowed down with shame at the thought that she could ever have dared to lecture *him*. But in another moment all her self-comtempt was lost in the greatness of her loving admiration of him. And she raised her face again, all aglow with a proud love, to his, and said,—

“And then?—go on.”

“And then, after that, I knew that I had an Unseen Companion with me. It was as if, like Nebuchadnezzar, my eyes had been opened to see the form of the Son of God walking with me through the furnace. But,” he suddenly broke off, with a change of tone, “I have given you a large enough dose of myself, for one night. Doesn’t it all sound like humbug to you?”

“Yes,” she answered, with a bright smile, and eyes that glistened with something besides the sunshine of her smile,—“yes, I am not to be taken in, by all your cant and humbug!”

“It is so strange to be talking about oneself!” he said, “and yet hardly strange, for you almost make me feel as if I were

talking aloud to another and better self, who understands all about me and cannot be bored by me."

"Would any one be bored by what you have been saying?"

Dr. Carl laughed, and then, "Most people would, I should imagine!" he answered. "Probably thousands of men as commonplace and matter of fact as myself have had the like experience, but who would care to talk of his innermost life, even to an intimate friend?"

"And have you never spoken about that day to any one before?"

"Yes, to one person," he said, while the shadow of a tender smile passed over his face,—“to the priest of whom I told you, who died this afternoon.”

There was a moment's silence between them; a hush which was full of peace, which might have been a silent blessing from the so-called dead, had fallen upon their spirits,—and then,—

"Ought we not to go back to your mother?" said Dr. Carl, in a changed

tone. "Her friends seem to be wishing her good night."

"Yes," returned Margaret, musingly; "but tell me first,—was it that day that you first resolved to be a doctor?"

"Yes; I *resolved*, feeling, rightly or wrongly, as though it were my mission, as though it were the one way in which I could be of use in the world."

"Oh, but don't you remember how you used to build castles in the air about an artist or literary life?"

"Yes," he laughed, "I remember my luxurious dreams of playing at art or authorship. I fancied that if I pleased my father by following some respectable profession, such as the law, for instance, I might indulge other inclinations according as the fancy took me."

"But you might have been an artist, a *real* artist, if you had put your heart into it?"

"Possibly, after a fashion. But I felt no particular call that way. I could have done pretty much the same as hundreds of other



men, but nothing out of the way, and I was not wanted as an artist."

"And you were wanted as a doctor?"

"Well, what do you think about it? Probably there is scarcely another case answering to mine. My father is very rich. He has only two sons. And although able to give me, his younger son, a good fortune, he wished me to follow some profession. He was against the army, but left me tolerably free otherwise. I had had my longings for the army, and my dreams, which my father laughed at, about art and authorship; but not until the day of which I have been telling you had I felt any real and thoroughly earnest desire to give myself up to one particular profession; and then I felt strongly that, by the profession of medicine, I could do good in a way that few besides myself could. For I had not to seek my living by my profession, and so—But your mother is looking towards us."

"I see; and I think you were quite right," answered Margaret, as they slowly

moved together towards Mrs. Willoughby's chair. "Was your father satisfied?"

"Yes,—entirely."

"And your mother?"

"My poor mother! She had a prejudice against the profession; but we talked her over. She did not like the sound of Dr. Meredith, though she would not have objected to it if it had meant Doctor of Divinity! I had a joke with her on the subject, and told her she might coin me into Dr. Carl."

Margaret laughed. "I am glad, though, that you have not given up your writing!" she said. "For, please forgive me for saying so, but it really would have been unkind to the world if you had!"

"Indeed, I hardly know how the world could manage to get on at all without the privilege of my valuable articles!" he said, after a hearty burst of laughter. "Yes, I scribble sometimes, when I have anything that I want to say. And I believe, to say the truth, that I enjoy the occupation all the more that I do not follow it as a profes-

sion, or merely '*pour passer le temps*;'—but just because I cannot help myself; or as a kind of safety valve from too much pressure of thought or irritation."

They were talking in a low tone as they came up to Mrs. Willoughby, who, having caught something of what they were saying, and having often heard Margaret's enthusiastic encomiums on Dr. Carl's style and sentiments, chimed in lightly with their talk, and then led the way to other subjects, until Dr. Carl found that it was really necessary for him to tear himself away from the enchantment of the Zähringer Hof.

## CHAPTER XII.

“GOING out, Margaret?” asked Mrs. Willoughby, in rather an aggrieved tone of voice, when Margaret came into her room the next morning with her hat on, and her sketching book in hand.

“Yes, mother, unless you want me for anything?”

“No, I don’t want you. But Dr. Carl is very late. He must have forgotten that he promised to look in to-day.”

“Most likely he’ll come this afternoon, mother.”

“It is hardly probable that he would fix upon this day for coming late, when he knows that I am knocked up by yesterday’s fatigue and fright, and that I am always worse in a morning. What is the use of his coming this afternoon?”

“But are you the worse for yesterday’s excitements, mother dear?”

“How could you expect anything else?” asked Mrs. Willoughby, indignantly.

In short, she was strong in the belief that it would be expected of her nerves to have been upset by the previous day’s exertions and anxieties, and had found little difficulty in persuading them to fulfil the duty that was expected of them. Margaret thought that her mother really seemed and looked ill, and she sighed for other reasons besides that of anxiety on her account.

“Dr. Carl promised that if he had time he would help me for a few minutes with my sketch this morning,” she said. “If I see him, shall I tell him that you would be glad if he would call in at once?”

“No,” answered Mrs. Willoughby, contrarily, “or probably he will come just as I am getting up. You can tell him that I am very unwell this morning. But I should suppose that if he has time for helping you with your drawing, he would have contrived to come and see me.”

Margaret blushed scarlet. She knew that it was not a medical visit that he had intended to pay Mrs. Willoughby that day, and she was afraid of making matters worse by anything that she might say.

“But, mother dear, he could not know that you were worse, and wanting to see him early, without being told.”

“He might have taken the trouble to come and inquire, I think,” said Mrs. Willoughby.

“But he knew that he should see me, and hear—” began Margaret, foolishly, and then she stopped short, with a more vivid and hotter blush.

Mrs. Willoughby’s thoughts were once more diverted, for a moment, from herself and her nerves, and she said,—

“You seem to see a great deal of Dr. Carl, my dear. I fancied that he was too much occupied with his patients to have time to speak to any one else !”

“He is very busy, mother,” replied Margaret, recovering her equanimity; “but he has an odd few minutes to spare sometimes,

and he is very fond of drawing, and has been very kind about helping me. Besides, I belong to one of his patients, you know," she added, judiciously, with a smile that soothed her mother's ruffled self-love.

"Nevertheless," thought Mrs. Willoughby to herself, as her daughter left her, "I am very thankful that she is safely engaged. I believe that that doctor has almost turned her head, foolish child! though of course he cannot be so absurd as to be in earnest about her!"

Margaret, meanwhile, in a state of mind which was tremblingly joyful, but by no means easy, pursued her way to the quiet spot which had been chosen as a place of rendezvous.

It was not long before Dr. Carl joined her there. Their tender meeting, the tenderness of their first talk, those may imagine who like. After a little time Margaret anxiously mentioned her mother. But both agreed that it was then too late for Dr. Carl to pay Mrs. Willoughby a morning visit, and they determined to make the most of the present



precious opportunity. It must be owned, by the way, that they did not accomplish much in the way of sketching.

“And when you got back to Oxford, for your last term, was it very different?” asked Margaret, presently, when they had travelled back again together, to the years of their separation. “Different from what it had been before?”

“Was my mode of life different? Not in the way you mean, I fancy,” returned Dr. Carl.

“Were people different to you? Was it hard?”

“Did I lead a peculiar life, and was I made a martyr of?” he said, with a laugh. “No, by no manner of means! So you cannot make a hero out of me, you see! I hope, however, that there was some sort of difference,” he added.

“You worked hard and took honours!” cried Margaret, eagerly.

“No, I did not so much as try for honours!” he returned, rather sadly. “For my own part, I still did not care a straw

about honours. But I was sorry to have to disappoint my father. I told him that, without the performance of a miracle, I could not so far make up for lost time as to come out first or second class. So we agreed to give 'honours' up altogether."

"And was he much annoyed?"

"He was vexed, but,—he is the best old father in the world, and I may be thankful that I had not to give him up, as well as the honours!"

"And when you left Oxford?"

"I went to my people abroad, for a time, and took a little holiday. They were in Switzerland, but on their way to Paris,—and there I lived with them for a while."

"And then I know what you did," interrupted Margaret. "You studied at the College of Physicians at Paris, and took a degree there; and you studied in England, afterwards, and walked the hospitals in London."

"You are right. Who told you this?"

"Mr. Thomas. And did you work at all amongst the poor in London?"

“Yes, for a while. I saw some of my poor friends of *that* day again.”

“You must have longed to give up your time to those miserable people in the east of London.”

“I did. But I had promised to join my people again on the continent, at the end of the necessary time in London. And for the last two or three years I have led a wandering life. My mother is never well in the same place for long together, so I have worked amongst the poor, for some two or three months at a time, first at one place and then at another. At length, however, we settled down here for a while. My people took a house for a year up above that wood there, far away from the town; but I settled myself where I am now, in a home of my own. Before the year was out, my mother began to fail again; I determined, however, to stick to my work here, for the present. So here, you see, I am.”

“You must have been very happy,” said Margaret. “It must be delightful to be able to give oneself up to doing good.”

“As to the good,” replied Dr. Carl, “it has been a mere drop in the ocean. But I have been much interested. I love my profession, and—yes, in spite of everything, they have been very happy years.”

And then for a while he remained gravely silent, for he was thinking that now a change had come, and that another six or eight years, spent in the same way, could not, under these new circumstances, be glad ones for him.

Margaret was the first to break silence.

“And have you told me all, now?” she asked. “Was not there something dreadful that came to you once? I like to know every little particular about your life, that I may live it over again, with you. Have you told it all to me?”

Her sweet eyes looked confidently up at him as she spoke, and she drew caressingly a little closer to him, while he laid his big hand tenderly upon her shoulder.

“No, not all,” he answered. “For I have not told you that while the years of my work went on, I always felt that some

one who was far away still belonged to my life,—that in some vague manner I dreamed that the day would come, somehow, some time, when I should find her and press her to my heart, that I learnt to be patient and contented in this my vague belief, until—” He paused again.

“Yes?” put in Margaret. “Did you hear of me at last? Why did you not come? Why did not we meet? It seems as if it would have been so easy!”

“I had been in London for a time, but had been summoned abroad by accounts of my mother’s illness. The night on which I left home I met an old Oxford friend of mine, Sir Thomas Fletcher. He also was bound for Dover, and we travelled by the same train. From him I heard of you. Poor fellow! He is the sort of fellow, you know, that always makes a confidant of one. I saw that he was unhappy, and very soon I learnt the cause. And at the same time I learnt, or rather gathered from what he said, that you were free,—that you were yet to be won! I learnt, too, that you were in London,

just as I was leaving! You may imagine the feelings of wild hope and wilder despair with which I listened to his tale. I might have seen you! I might, it seemed to me, have taught you to love me,—was I very presumptuous?”

Here came a pause for tender touches, and tender looks, and for blessed rest in the delicious present.

“Why must everything in this world happen so perversely? I asked myself,” continued Dr. Carl. “Why had it been decreed that I should leave England, just at the moment when it would have been sweet to remain? I had no cause for real anxiety about my mother; but I knew that I was wanted at home, and there was nothing, alas, for which I was wanted in England! My heart sank, for I thought, ‘When I return, when I am able to seek her, it may be too late!’ Sir Thomas Fletcher had mentioned Miles Grantham, half with amusement, half with pity. ‘He has grossly deceived himself, poor fellow,’ he had said, ‘he made quite sure of her! But he will not get her, any

more than the rest of us ! ' so what I had considered my old jealous enmity towards Miles had now been changed into pity ; and, in my impatience, I wrote to him from Switzerland, in a somewhat sympathizing strain, at the same time begging for news of Darlingster and Grantham. His answer was a right-down cunning one, and succeeded in dashing my new-born hopes to the ground. He told me that *his* hopes were growing stronger, that you had been long in making up your mind, but that those interested in you, as well as himself, ' the most deeply interested,' were strong in their belief of your real feelings, and that he was in his heart convinced that the love of all his life would finally prevail ! I need not tell of the keenness of my disappointment ! By degrees its pain mitigated, and I drifted back again into my former state of half-hopeful content.

" And you never thought of coming to see us ? " said Margaret, with gentle, half-wondering reproach.

" I thought of it often, but did not dare to



do it. I longed often; but resisted my longings. At length, however, the strength of my wishes overcame my fears and my prudence, and one time, when I was in town, I ran down to Darlingster, to find that you and the Granthams were from home, and to hear from Darlingster gossips that you and Miles Grantham were engaged to be married. Some said engaged, some said 'as good as engaged.' I wrote to Miles to congratulate him, half hoping that I might receive from him, in return, a denial of the news. Instead of which, I got a letter accepting the congratulations, and saying that he hoped I would some day give his future wife and himself the pleasure of seeing me at his present home, Millby Grange, Lincolnshire. In short there appeared to be not the shadow of a doubt that it was an actual engagement."

"To think of his being so utterly base and false!" said Margaret. "I always felt that he was bad, but I little dreamed that he was making you suffer so by his lies. Surely he must have known that they would

be found out at last ! What could his object be in deceiving you ? ”

“ His object clearly was to keep me at a distance from you. He must really love you, poor fellow,—and yet it is hard to believe that possible ! ”

“ I believe he loves no one but himself,” cried Margaret, boiling over with indignation, “ and I hope mamma will soon be made to feel the same. Was it then that you got the dreadful feeling ? ”

“ No, not then. I lived through my misery, and somehow was not utterly miserable, after all. I lived and worked, and loved you still, and knew that an end of it all would come, in time, but that still I should love you ! Last August I went to London again,——”

“ Ah, I heard of that ; you were at the Royal Academy one day.”

“ You heard of it, then, from Lord Mark Denham ? ”

“ Yes,” said Margaret. “ Did he—did he tell you that he was going to see us at Grantham ? ”

“Yes, and in his exuberant and buoyant manner, he let out the secret of all that he intended to accomplish at Grantham, and even gave me to understand that he had not a doubt of success, that he believed in your love as he believed in your truth.”

Margaret looked for a moment sad and thoughtful. But her sorrow in the thought of the pain which she had unwittingly caused Lord Mark Denham was soon lost in her eagerness to hear the remainder of Dr. Carl’s narrative.

“I exclaimed in astonishment that I thought that you were engaged to Miles Grantham. His laugh as he replied to me was like a knife cutting at my heart. That sounds rather like a bit of an old sentimental novel, by the by, doesn’t it?” broke off Dr. Carl, with a laugh at his own expense. “But, seriously, I shall never forget the sharp, irritating sensation that Lord Mark Denham’s delightful laugh occasioned me. For it told me, all in a moment, the whole story of how I had been deceived by a scoundrel, of how I had been fool enough to believe in a

scoundrel ! Whether at the moment I most cursed my own folly, or Grantham's base cunning, fate, or some sort of evil being who had worked out my ill-fortune, I hardly know. I realized keenly that, through my own folly and another's wickedness, I had lost what I might have gained,—the one inestimable blessing that could have made my life on earth worth having,—and I realized nothing else. As I looked back upon the past, my mind was all in confusion. Virtue and vice, goodness and folly, generosity and absurd quixotism, faith and ridiculous credulity, love and jealousy, were all jumbled up together in my mind ; and, for the instant, I believed in nothing but that I was an utter fool, and that Miles Grantham was a demon ; ay, and for long afterwards I believed, or I at least fancied that I believed, in nothing good. ‘I believe that the whole universe,’ said Lord Mark (when his merriment would allow him to speak), ‘has been ringing out the lie of *her* engagement to that ass, Miles Grantham !’ ‘I, at least, heard the news from himself !’ I replied. And

then he laughed again. 'Absurd idiot!' he said (I almost felt as if he was alluding to myself!),—'absurd idiot! Don't you know, Meredith, that that bumptious ass, Miles Grantham, is the one person on earth whom her gentle heart finds it possible to hate?' 'Oh, indeed!' I said with a smile, it seemed to me as if some one else was smiling, and some one else was speaking, while I, Charles Meredith, was far away in Demon Land! 'I congratulate you on the hatred which involves, I imagine, the love of yourself! I wish you joy, old fellow, I must be off.' I cordially shook his hand, and turned away, while a joyous echo of my own congratulations seemed to ring in my ears, with such ghastly sound as a jovial marriage song might have by the side of a solemn death-bed."

"And did it last, that horrible feeling? And did not you soon find out that—that you need not have been miserable?" said Margaret, when Dr. Carl paused.

"You may well ask this! You see I had not learnt wisdom from past folly. I jumped

quickly to a conclusion. I felt no sort of doubt that Lord Mark Denham's suit would prove successful; and I had not courage to face what I believed to be a fact. I could not bring myself to write to ask if I might repeat my congratulations. I preferred to go on in the misery of my moral certainty. I could not endure to *think* about Lord Mark's joy, because it brought to me the sense of all the blessedness that I myself had lost. I preferred to dwell on the wretchedness which I had gained. And so, for a while, my hell, I can call it nothing less, lasted."

Margaret's answer now was a little soft involuntary touch of sympathy, and the eyes which she raised to Dr. Carl's face were as full of sorrowful pity as if he were indeed still in the past hell of which he had spoken, and she were an angel sent to him with a pitying message from heaven. She murmured, half aloud, something which began with "poor."

"Are you pitying me for my wickedness?" asked Dr. Carl, pressing her to him

in such a manner as made the assurance of his present heaven doubly sure.

“Were you wicked?” was Margaret’s return. “Go on, tell me all your wickedness. What did you do after your meeting with Lord Mark Denham? Did you go on staying longer in London?”

“No, I was glad to get out of London. I was glad to be bound for Fribourg,—or rather, I think I should say, I did not much care what I did, so that I could move away from—anywhere!”

“And when you got to Fribourg what did you do?”

“What did I do? Much as usual,—what I had always done. I had my work to do, you know. Those poor creatures could not be neglected because I was a miserable wretch and wicked fool! But for awhile, I still felt as if it was some one else who was doing and saying all that had to be done and said; as if I was myself far away in some miserable land, while some one else was moving amongst the poor people, curing or soothing them, listening to their



complaints or to their words of gratitude, or of simple religious faith."

"And at last?" said Margaret.

"At last," returned Dr. Carl, "I hardly know how or when, but by degrees, the misery of some,—worse misery than mine,—or the patience and gentleness of others, touched my heart. It was a momentary, awakening touch, coming every now and then, until at length, I believe, the selfish devil which had shut up my heart in its cold and faithless prison was ashamed to stay any longer. He did not like the pretty tender sound of little Fritz's voice, or the look of his smile as he thanked me for nothing. He did not like the gentle look of unearthly brightness that was stealing over the face of the dying girl at the wood-shop. And, above all, he could not bear the simple earnestness and the large-hearted love of the lonely priest, whose saintliness he would have scoffed at, if he could,—and so he went. Or rather, it seemed to me that a whole legion of noisy devils went away one day, and left a peaceful atmosphere about me.

“So that you could hear,” said Margaret, softly, knowing what was in his mind, as he once more paused, “so that you could hear again the sweet, low Voice, and know again that you had a holy Companion.”

“Just so,” he answered; and then there was silence between them for a moment.

“With me in my sorrow,” then said Dr. Carl, in a musing tone.

“And you were still sad?”

“Yes,” he returned, “I must have been, though I hardly knew it in my new-found life and pleasure in my work; I hardly knew it, until suddenly the relief came, and I knew that I might hope.”

“And what brought the relief?” asked Margaret.

“I stumbled unexpectedly upon an old acquaintance of mine, and an old friend of yours,” returned Dr. Carl.

“Mr. Thomas!” exclaimed Margaret. “The good, kind, dear old friend! I always felt as if he would do us some good.”

“Yes, Mr. Thomas. I had only known him slightly before, and our meeting was

quite accidental, though he had heard me speak of life in Fribourg, and said he had had an impression and hope that he should fall in with me here. He was wonderfully glad, and wonderfully cordial, and I found out afterwards that this had all been for your sake."

"For my sake? Hardly, I should think! But how good and kind he is!"

"He is. He is a capital fellow. I had known him a little in London; but our acquaintance had principally been professional and literary."

"I had heard of you from him, you know, as Dr. Carl; and it was he who lent me those articles of yours that I enjoyed reading so much."

"He tried to persuade me to come down to Darlingster once; but at the time it was not in my power to accept the invitation."

"Ah, I remember he said he had asked you to come, and I wanted so much to know you. I remember, too, that he said that he knew Charles Meredith, and believed that he was abroad,—and how he looked at me as he said it!"

“I let out to him once,—though it was no secret,—my real name, and that I had been at Darlingster once upon a time (he was away, so I did not meet him during my stay there, you remember). But he is a secretive and cautious man, and I learnt little about any one from him. I did not, either, care to talk with a stranger about my private affairs. Until he came here the other day, I supposed that he was just acquainted with you as a patient, and that this was all.”

“And then? How did it all happen? How——”

“Well, I hardly know. One meets acquaintances abroad, as though they were old friends; and one is expected to want to hear something about everybody in England. So I somehow found myself, all of a sudden, drawn into a conversation about all that interested me most, hearing names that were most dear to me, asking questions and receiving answers, discovering that Mr. Thomas had divined instinctively things respecting me, which I had fancied buried too deeply down to be divined by the man of deepest insight.

And soon I was giving him a piece of Darlings-ster news which he had not heard, and which he laughed to scorn,—in his quick fashion, you know. ‘I know all about Lord Mark Denham,’ he said; ‘but I have no sort of belief in this engagement of which you tell me.’ And then he laughed at my ‘morbid credulity and uncontrolled imagination,’ and comforted me, as it seemed, against my own reason. But I did not dare, to myself even, to own that he had given me hope and comfort. ‘I will not allow myself to be disappointed again,’ I thought. But yet I felt a strange confidence in Mr. Thomas’ judgment, and power, and help. I almost felt, like you, as if he must somehow be about to work us good! I made him promise, if I was right, to give you my congratulations, and to entreat you, as a favour, for the sake of our long ago friendship, if you made your tour abroad, to allow Fribourg to form a part of it. I told him to tell you that I longed to see you in your happiness. He promised, too, that he would write to me from Darlings-ster.”

“And he kept his promise,” put in Margaret.

“He kept his promise, perhaps in the wisest and kindest way. I had begun to think that he had forgotten all about me and our conversation, when, one Sunday in the cathedral, I suddenly saw an apparition of you! I had so often pictured to myself the sight of you, that my first feeling was scarcely one of surprise; it was just as if my imaginary picture had suddenly been changed into flesh and blood,—only, I had pictured you by the side of Lord Mark Denham! ‘Could the marriage,’ I thought, ‘have taken place so speedily? Was he hidden anywhere? No, impossible!’ And my chief surprise in that strange moment seemed to be that you were by yourself. A thousand recollections and thoughts and feelings passed quickly through my mind and memory, and as I glanced at you, I remembered vividly your earnest looks and words, when we had last met, and I felt that there was a life, there was a way, in which, at least, we need not be divided!”

“ Ah,” said Margaret, in a low tone, “that was what you were feeling when I first, for an instant, caught sight of you,—when I recognised the look in your eyes ! And then, the next day ? ”

“ The next day you know all about. I received the letter of introduction which told me that I had been wrong. I hardly knew then if I might dare to let you know that I loved you still ; but the thought that I was to be near you, and speak to you again,—you may imagine what it was ? ”

“ Why, I wonder, had he not written to you before ? ”

“ To tell me about the engagement to Miles Grantham ? If he had, I should have felt that I ought not to put myself in your way.”

“ Oh, he could not have told of the engagement,—it was my secret.”

“ And therefore he could not have written to me fairly. For, after our conversation, he could not have avoided touching on the subject of your supposed engagement to Lord Mark Denham. So he could not have done



better than wait to send you as the messenger of your own news!"

"And certainly," said Margaret, "if he had told me that Dr. Carl meant you, I should not have dared to send for you when mamma was ill. Oh, and I could not have come here without telling mamma, and—" She paused.

"And if Mrs. Willoughby had known, she would not have come?" put in Dr. Carl.

Then they looked at each other, for a moment, in grave silence, the same fear making both their hearts tremble.

"But," said Margaret, soon recovering her spirits, "it will be very different her knowing now, for you will explain to her all about everything, and she trusts you, and is fond of you. You don't know how much she thinks of you!"

Dr. Carl's own misgivings were not entirely set at rest. But he allowed her hopefulness to gladden him, in spite of himself, and drew her more closely to him, as though to keep fast hold of the heaven which he had feared to lose.

“I ought to be going back to mamma,” said Margaret, suddenly, at last, with a sigh.

“And I,” returned Dr. Carl, echoing her sigh, “ought to be at my work;” and he remembered, remorsefully, that he had promised, to look in again that morning upon poor little Fritz, who was ailing more, and had cried after him, and complained of the shortness of his visit.

But they did not even yet separate. Dr. Carl led the way by a scrambling path up to the back of the Zähringer Hof. He was privileged to go by several private ways from which the world in general were shut out. And a key which he had in his pocket opened a door to let himself and Margaret into a picturesque climbing garden, green and gold and red with all manner of autumn-tinted foliage, and sweet with roses and other flowers, which still lingered in that sheltered spot. And then, in a secret corner, —hidden, they fondly trusted, from all eyes, —they said their farewell. They were, they hoped, to meet again in a few hours; but

they parted in a manner that might have bespoken a parting for years.

“Good-bye,” said Dr. Carl, when they had reached the more public place from which they must really go their separate ways! “Good-bye!” And the tone in which he said the words was involuntarily so lingeringly pathetic, that Margaret, as she gave her hand for the last final grasp, turned on him a smile so sad in its sweetness that the recollection of it haunted him for long.

Why should they have been thus sorrowful over a separation that was to last only for a few short hours? Why should they have lingered over final looks, and final words, as though the parting was to be a parting by death, and they were never to meet, on this side the grave, again?

## CHAPTER XIII.

"JANE, has Miss Margaret come in?" said Mrs. Willoughby, looking up languidly from the sofa in her room, as the maid entered. "It is just one o'clock; she ought to be coming in for luncheon."

"Yes 'm, she had ought," returned Jane, grimly. "I see her not far off. Perhaps she'll be in soon; but I would not wait for her, ma'am, for you looks starved to death!"

"I thought she would have sent Dr. Carl to see me before this," said Mrs. Willoughby, with a whimper in her voice.

"Any one would have thought she might have spared him, and you so ill, ma'am."

"She was to have had a sketching lesson from him, but it is not likely that he would have been able to spare all this time to her; of course in that case she would have sent him

to me," said Mrs. Willoughby, in a tone of affront. "Probably she has not fallen in with him."

"I don't know about sketching, but I know that she was with him when I saw her just now," returned Jane.

"Where, Jane?" asked her mistress, eagerly, "Probably, then, he will be here directly."

"They didn't seem to be in no hurry to come in, anyway," said Jane.

"What do you mean, Jane? Where were they?"

"I'm sure I didn't want to spy on them, nor nothing, nor I don't want to tell on them. But it don't seem exactly right as Miss Margaret should go on secret-like, in that way; and she engaged to another young gentleman and all!"

"What nonsense are you talking, Jane?" said her mistress, sharply. "I won't hear any more of it."

"Very well, ma'am. Hope you'll find it's nonsense," said Jane, sullenly. "I don't want to interfere. I suppose it is only

natural that Miss Margaret should like a young gentleman that's more after the fashion of that young Mr. Meredith, that took her fancy years gone by, than one that her mamma wishes her to marry."

"Be quiet, Jane; what has Dr. Carl to do with Mr. Meredith?" asked Mrs. Willoughby, roused into querulous eagerness by Jane's allusion.

"I don't suppose he has nothing to do with him. But there's the kind of young gentleman what wilful young ladies likes, and there's the kind what their mammas thinks good for them."

"By the by," said Mrs. Willoughby to herself, suddenly, "that's the likeness that has been puzzling me! There is a look of Charles Meredith! But Margaret would hardly be so foolish as to flirt with a man because he has an expression like the boy-lover whom she was romantic about years ago! Perhaps he is his cousin, and has been stirring up old remembrances in the girl's head. The child has not seemed like herself lately. I must put a stop to this

ridiculous intimacy before it goes too far. Were they coming up to the hotel when you saw them, Jane?" she added, aloud.

"They were standing as still as two stocks, ma'am," said Jane. "They thought they was hidden by the trees, and that no one saw them, at the bottom of the steps at the back; that's where they was. I had given the order about your luncheon, and I just stepped out, accidental-like, and I saw them."

"And were they talking together?"

"It might be called talking," said Jane; "but I did not know as either of them was deaf."

"Deaf?" exclaimed Mrs. Willoughby, inquiringly.

"I had an old uncle who was so deaf that if my aunt had anything particular to say to him, she had used to put her face quite close to his, and her lips to his ear; but I don't know as Miss Margaret's like he."

"Jane, you must have been dreaming. You must have been mistaken. It must have been two of the servants that you saw,"



said Mrs. Willoughby, after a pause of horror.

“I may have been dreaming, ma’am, but it was not two of the servants as I see in my dream, but Dr. Carl and Miss Margaret, large as life.”

“And you mean to tell me that they, that they—I can’t believe it,” panted Mrs. Willoughby.

“I ain’t going to tell anything about it, ma’am,” replied Jane, “particularly as you would not believe me if I did. We must do to others as we would they should do to us, and when Tom Cockerall kissed me in the meadow down by Giles’ Farm, I wouldn’t have liked as any young gentleman or lady should have told of it to father or mother, nor to the young woman he was going to marry. So I won’t say a word, ma’am; and here comes Miss Margaret, looking as innocent as a new-born babe and all,” she added, in an undertone, while Mrs. Willoughby raised a disturbed and angry face to Margaret’s bright and blooming one.

For Margaret had been to her room, and

there in a minute had rid herself of all signs of agitation. Beneath the influence of blissful remembrances, and yet more blissful hopes, she had sent away all the shadows of foreboding that had darkened the past farewell moments with her friend. And now, as she stood in her mother's doorway, she was all in a glow of loving gladness. But the brightness of her face was so soft and tender, that it was wonderful that her mother could avoid forgetting all her invalidism, and all her suspicions and vexations, and hastening to throw loving arms around her beautiful child, and to tell her that she already divined something of her happy secret, and was prepared to give fullest sympathy. But nothing of all this was in Mrs. Willoughby's heart. She did not observe anything charming or attractive about her daughter,—anything unusual, wistful, or touching, anything requiring a mother's caressing fondness.

“Selfish, wilful, thoughtless, caring nothing about me and my ill-health, not caring how much trouble and anxiety she causes me!”

Such was the thought passing through her mind, as she gazed blindly in the direction of the new comer. And Margaret, in her way, was equally blind. She observed nothing forbidding in her mother's appearance.

"Well, mother darling, how are you now?" she said, as she moved towards her mother, and then stooped to kiss her, with the feeling that she must divine by intuition something of all that had happened to her, some of this new glad life, into which, as it were, she had been born.

"Oh, mother, it is so lovely!" she went on, quickly, "I wish you could have been out too! It is rather a fresh air, and I am afraid you may find it keen this afternoon, but it is so bright and so perfectly beautiful!"

"I am glad you enjoyed it, my dear," said Mrs. Willoughby, coldly drawing herself back, and adding, in her most martyr-like tone of voice, "I suppose you were too happy to remember that I was ill, and wished to see Dr. Carl?"

“Mamma!” exclaimed Margaret, rising hastily, with the feeling that a dash of icy water had suddenly struck at all the warmth and gladness of her heart. “Mamma!” she cried, and the look and tone with which she uttered the name might have struck home, reproachfully, as an answering blow, to Mrs. Willoughby’s heart. But recovering herself quickly, “I told Dr. Carl that you were feeling knocked up from yesterday’s fatigue,” she added, quietly, “and he was very sorry; but it was too late when I met him, for him to come and see you then. I said I thought that you would probably be dressing, and that it would be better for him to wait until the afternoon. He hoped that by that time you might be rested and better, and might not need him; but he is coming, at all events, to see you as a friend. Is not luncheon ready?” she added, abruptly, with a glance towards Jane, who was standing at the door, and had been an eager witness of the foregoing scene.

“Would you like to have the luncheon up

here, ma'am?" asked the maid, not deigning to reply to Margaret's question.

"I told you we would," replied Mrs. Willoughby, impatiently. "We are quite ready for it. I have long been faint from the want of it."

"Have you, mother? I am so sorry," said Margaret, as Jane left the room.

"It is of no consequence," returned Mrs. Willoughby, resignedly. "I suppose you were too much engrossed by your sketching to remember how the time was passing! Let me see what you have done."

"After all, I have been lazy and have done no sketching," replied Margaret, blushing.

"Then what have you been about?—strolling all the morning with Dr. Carl?"

"Yes, mother. At least, we have been sitting and strolling together for a good long time."

"I am afraid from what I hear that you are becoming rather too intimate with Dr. Carl," said her mother.

"From what you hear, mother? But

surely you have known yourself, long, that I have got intimate with Dr. Carl? And you are intimate with him yourself, and fond of him too!"

"Fond of him, my dear? I like him very much as a doctor, and I think him an agreeable man,—so agreeable that I am afraid there may be danger in your seeing too much of him."

"Mother," began Margaret, in a tone half of distress and half of surprise; and then she paused, not knowing at the moment what it would be best to say, how much it would be well for her to explain. She was afraid of raising a storm of unreasonable agitation in her mother's mind, and was at a loss for words to express truly, rightly, and judiciously, all that it would be necessary to say.

"Well, my dear," said her mother, "I am sure Dr. Carl is too sensible a man, and too honourable, to put any nonsense into your head, intentionally; but I was a little afraid that you might have been so foolish as to be influenced by that likeness

to Charles Meredith, which you pretended not to see.”

Margaret stood astounded, and hastily turned away to busy herself about some trifle, that her mother might not perceive the tell-tale carmine that had overspread her face.

“Likeness to Charles Meredith? What do you mean about my having pretended not to see it? You see a likeness, then, mother?”

“Don’t you remember? From the very beginning I was sure he was like some one, and I was only afraid of your allowing romantic fancies to make you forget that you were engaged. I should be sorry to think that the agreeable doctor could make you disloyal, for ever so short a time, to——”

“Oh, mother dear,” broke in Margaret, “I don’t think that when everything has been explained you will call me disloyal! I don’t think that you will be displeased when you have heard all the strange story; or, if some things pain you, I am sure that,



as a whole, you will be thankful and glad."

"I don't understand you, Margaret; I hope that you have not been doing anything foolish. I don't see what I could hear that would make me more glad and satisfied than I already am about your engagement to dear Miles Grantham!"

"Oh, but mother, when you hear, when you know, you will think it all as wonderful as a fairy-tale, and will feel as glad as a mother in a happy story-book," said Margaret, trading upon her mother's well-known love of sensation and the marvellous.

"My dear child, do explain what you mean! What is all this nonsense?" cried her mother, trying to hide the eager excitement that she was experiencing.

"I cannot explain, just now, mother, but Dr. Carl has much to say to you this afternoon. I hope that you will be well enough to listen to his wonderful story. And, mother, darling, I do trust that you will be very, very glad, that you will forgive me everything, and that it will be all right."

“Forgive you?” cried Mrs. Willoughby.

“Yes, mother dear, if you think that I need forgiveness. I have not meant to deceive you, but it has all been so strange! And yet everything has come so naturally!—like an easily-written book.”

At this moment a *garçon* appeared with the luncheon.

“What can it all be about? What does this mystery mean? Can Dr. Carl be an exiled prince in disguise? Or can he have divulged a secret about Charles Meredith? Can the poor boy have turned out to be an earl’s son? Perhaps they are brothers,—which would account for the likeness,—sons of some cruel earl, whom they have displeased! Or——”

In short, there was no end to the fancies that passed quickly through Mrs. Willoughby’s mind! But she could obtain no more information from Margaret, at present; and when she was left alone again to rest, in preparation for the excitement in prospect, she once more brooded in dissatisfaction on

all that Jane had told her before Margaret's return.

"If it is *not* that," she said to herself, presently,—"*that*" bearing reference to the "prince in disguise," or something nearly equally magnificent,—"*if it is not* that, he has behaved disgracefully, and so has Margaret!"

Prejudice, obstinate determination, fear of opposition, thought of her own ill health, and the sympathy and attention due to her every wish, mingled together with other unamiable and egoistical thoughts and sensations, were soon setting her nerves on edge, and making havoc of her temper. So she was in no pleasant mood at the moment when Jane came to tell her that her looked-for visitor had arrived.

## CHAPTER XIV.

“ I AM ready to see him, Jane,” said Mrs. Willoughby, and then she remembered her nerves, gave a little sigh, put on a martyr-like expression of countenance, and thought to herself that Dr. Carl would find her looking very pale and interesting. After which, she allowed her fancy once more to feast itself on the notion of a duke or earl in disguise. Surely something very delightful and very extraordinary must be about to reveal itself to her ! To have a prince, who was at the same time a doctor such as Dr. Carl, for a son-in-law, would certainly, she thought, be the height of felicity. To have a prince-doctor, always tenderly alive to the interests of her nervous system ! What possible more blissful fate could be imagined than this ? But woe to Dr. Carl if

he did not realise all her great expectations!

She received him with her usual languid manner. She smiled faintly, a smile that seemed to say, "See how ill I am, and how patiently I bear pain and all troubles!" But he had not been half a minute in her presence before he wounded and disappointed her in a manner that would tell very much against the cause that he had in hand. To be sure, in greeting her, he had asked her how she was, but in the most common-place fashion, quite absently, as though she were anyone else, as though her reply were of no consequence to him. And when she had given her answer!—it would almost seem as if he had not taken it in! What did he mean by standing there staring at her, intently, and saying that he was "very glad to hear it?" "Very glad to hear" that she was suffering very much, and feeling very ill and languid, and a great deal more besides! "Very glad to hear it!" Was the man a fool or mad? Was he a stock or a stone? Was he a hypocritical

designer, who had been feigning interest in her nervous system, all this time, with a view to certain ends of his own? He should find himself deceived, in his turn! He should find that she was not to be so easily imposed upon. He should find that, for all her usual gentleness, she could be severely indignant when justice required it of her. And as the recollection of the scene that Jane had witnessed that morning, flashed vividly across her memory, she decided that justice most undoubtedly required it of her at that very moment! The effort might cause a sudden attack of illness,—she might faint at his feet,—no matter! or rather, she would be all the better pleased, he would discover then of how great a mistake he had been guilty! He would perceive that he could not with impunity play with the feelings of a sensitive and delicate woman like herself.

“My daughter tells me, Dr. Carl,” she said, with severe dignity, that,—that you wish to speak with me,—that you have something to tell me?”

He had indeed something to tell her; he had indeed so much to say that he stood for a moment overwhelmed with the vastness and importance, as it appeared to him, of the matter which he had at heart, of the petition which he had come to make. Strong man though he was, he stood trembling before the weak woman who, nevertheless, seemed to him, at the moment, to hold the destiny of his future in her hand, for weal or woe! All the well-shaped sentences with which he had come ready armed,—with which he had meant to speak and conquer,—had forsaken his memory, and he could find no adequate language with which to begin his explanations and his pleadings. The words which came to his rescue at last were common-place enough. But the earnestness of his low tone, the touching simplicity, the fervour and tender pleadings, with which they were alive, must have made them strike home to the hearts of most listeners, however little able they might have been to grant the favour requested.

Seating himself by the sofa on which Mrs.



Willoughby was reclining, "I have indeed very much to say," he began, "if you will be good enough to listen to me. I have a confession to make which I fear you may consider presumptuous. I,—I,—in short Mrs. Willoughby, I may as well out with it, at once,—I love your daughter, and you, who know her and love her too, will believe how impossible it was that I could be with her, and do otherwise. I love her as well as it is possible for a man to love a woman, and though you may think me unworthy of it, I have good reason to know that she returns my love, and if you will trust her to me, if——"

Mrs. Willoughby had listened hitherto in silence, though her face had flushed angrily, and had quivered with passionate irritation. But as for an instant he paused to regain the composure of which the fulness of his heart was robbing him, she suddenly raised her head from the sofa cushion, sat bolt upright, and looking at him with a look which she meant to express dignified reproach, but which only succeeded in being

ridiculously pompous, said,—in what Margaret would have called the tone and language of some one talking out of a book,—

“You have done my daughter great honour, Dr. Carl; but Margaret is already engaged to be married, and therefore, for your own sake as well as for hers, it will be well for you to conquer your feelings as soon as you can.”

“I know that Miss Willoughby is engaged *conditionally*,” replied Dr. Carl; “but I think that I have explanations to give, which will make you agree with your daughter and myself that she is fully justified in breaking the engagement.”

“After all, then, he may be a duke’s son, or a German prince!” said Mrs. Willoughby, quickly, to herself, and she replied, more graciously,—

“Pray explain yourself, Dr. Carl? I am sure I should be only too glad if, consistently with honour—” She paused, and prepared herself to listen to what she fondly hoped would be splendid and exciting explanations.

Thus encouraged, Dr. Carl proceeded.

“Mrs. Willoughby,” he said, “may I ask you a curious question? Will you tell me if it has ever crossed your mind that you have seen me before? Has it ever occurred to you that I might have some other name besides that of Dr. Carl?”

“Yes, yes!” exclaimed Mrs. Willoughby, excitedly, “I said so from the very beginning, and Margaret would not believe me!”

And then, her head running on princes in disguise, she went on, letting her words come tumbling headlong out of her mouth, in a rush which almost seemed to form one long word,—

“When could it have been? It comes over me like a dream that I saw you when I was presented; no, that could not have been. I suppose you’d have been too young, else I believe there were several distinguished foreigners at court at the time, cousins of Queen Adelaide. To be sure, your father may have been there; it may be of him that I am thinking all the time.”

This sudden torrent of words, so different from the languidly measured tones in which

Mrs. Willoughby usually spoke, might well have taken Dr. Carl's breath away. He certainly stood for a moment, wonder-struck, —wondering whether the mother of his darling had lost her senses for good and all! But finding her eyes fixed on his with anxious inquiry, he said,—

“I need not ask you to carry back your memory quite so far, Mrs. Willoughby. I knew you eight years ago, at Grantham.”

He spoke lightly. He had no reason to suppose that Mrs. Willoughby had any especial prejudice against her old acquaintance, Charles Meredith. And her pleased exclamation, that from the very beginning she had recognized his face as one that she had seen before, had impressed him hopefully. After all, he thought, perhaps when she learnt that he belonged to a well-known English family,—a family that could boast of ancestors,—and was, moreover, the son of a man of property,—after all, perhaps he might gain more favour in her eyes. Perhaps she might be brought to listen to his suit, to believe his story, and to forgive him

for proving her favourite Miles Grantham to be unworthy of her daughter's hand. In short, reasonably or unreasonably, his spirits suddenly rose, and with a smile he went on pleasantly,—

“I am Charles Meredith, Mrs. Willoughby——”

But before he could add another word, Mrs. Willoughby had started up from her sofa, screaming at the top of her voice,—

“Charles Meredith! Charles Meredith, did you say?” and looking at him with eyes which seemed to be accusing him of having confessed himself to be a venomous serpent in disguise. And while he stood up and returned her gaze with one of astonishment, she continued, with panting volubility, “I knew it, I was sure of it; it is a plot, a deep-laid plot! Under a pretended name, under false pretences, you have carried out your designs on my daughter, and have contaminated her!—taught her to be as base a deceiver as yourself!—my child, my only daughter, whom I have loved and trusted!—and to think that she should treat

me thus!" Her voice rose to its highest pitch, and she clasped her hands theatrically together.

"She would make a capital actress,—of a sort,—would this mad woman!" thought Charles Meredith, although her madness and theatrical absurdity were no joke to him, under the circumstances. He was not allowed to interpose a word, for the voluble string of words went flowing on, without intermission.

"I always said it, from the beginning, when he first came,"—she spoke, in soliloquy. "I warned them,—I warned them all; but they would not believe me. I told them that he was a mere adventurer, and now it is proved that I was right,"—here she interrupted herself to look up in his face, and say, shaking a clenched fist and speaking between her teeth, "but the world shall know of your conduct, sir! You shall not get off so easily as you imagine; you—she——"

"Pray tell me, Mrs. Willoughby, in what manner my conduct has been blamable?"

at last Charles contrived to say, with a quiet desperation.

“ Blamable !—in what way your conduct— You dare to ask?—after a long course of imposture,—after teaching my child to—to be false,—false to her vows, false to those who love her (ay, and whom she loves too), —undutiful to her mother,—my only child, and I a widow and in a precarious state of health ! You dare,—you, you,— Sir, I scorn to answer your question,—ask it of your own conscience, for I can only answer you with silence.”

“ Oh, that you would act upon your scorn !” said Charles Meredith, mentally. “ Oh, that you would permit a minute’s lucid interval of silence to get possession of you, so that I might have breathing time for explanation !” And as, for an instant, she paused, breathless and panting, he struck in with a few calm words. But he might as well have attempted to reason with a roaring wild bull, whose only cause of complaint was a blood-red piece of rag, as to get Mrs. Willoughby, in her present state



of nerves, to listen to him! Even while he spoke, she was off again in a torrent of incoherent invectives and reproaches, from which she only broke away to fall into a very violent fit of hysterics.

“Leave me, leave me!” she gasped, as Dr. Carl approached to apply medical remedies.

So having rung the bell, and given professional orders to Jane, he thought it best to take his patient at her word, and retreat from the field of battle, discomfited, but not bereft of hope.

“Of course Margaret will bring the maniac to her senses, and make her see things in their true light,” he said to himself, as he left the hotel, “and when next I see her, I shall find the way smooth, and all difficulty of persuasion at an end. Besides,—the notion of the happiness of her life being at the mercy of her miserable mother’s disordered nervous system! Why, the woman is little better than a lunatic, and must be treated as such. I should think that even my sweet Margaret would

see that filial affection and duty do not bind a daughter to be ruled by the vagaries of a mad woman ! ”

Here he paused in his thoughts, and looked round, half in hopes that he might catch sight of Margaret wandering about somewhere at hand. But no,—of course she would be in doors, awaiting anxiously the result of the interview ! What should he do ?

Dare he go back to the door of the hotel and ask to see Miss Willoughby ? Would Mrs. Willoughby hear of it, and make her daughter suffer doubly for his rashness ? The desire to see her, speak with her, acquaint her with his failure, if possible before she had seen her mother, comfort her, take council with her and exhort her to be of good heart, became so intolerable that it was not to be gainsaid, and all fears and irresolutions giving way before it, he returned to the entrance of the Zähringer Hof, and, in a business-like tone of voice, sent up a message by one of the garçons. It would appear quite natural that

he might want to speak with his patient's daughter on some matter connected with his orders to her, he said to himself, while he stood trembling outside the hotel. In a few minutes Jane came down with a message to the effect that Miss Willoughby was engaged with her mother, regretted that it was impossible for her to see Dr. Carl, and begged that he would say all that he had to say about his patient to her maid.

"She must be kept extremely quiet to-day, but if she seems better, and the hysteria passes off, a little fresh air might do her good later on in the afternoon," said Dr. Carl, hardly knowing that he himself was the giver of the hastily-concocted and calmly spoken orders. "I will see her to-morrow," he added; and then, scarcely aware of Jane's impertinent and discouraging looks and replies, he hastily turned, and mechanically made his way down to the lower part of the town.

"I must write," he said to himself,—*"I must write!"* And going home, he wrote,

first, a short, appealing, sad, and yet hopeful note to Margaret, expressing a quarter of what he had longed to say *viva voce*; and, secondly, a long courteous explanatory letter to Mrs. Willoughby, after which,

“There!” he said to himself, “if her mind has not yet crossed the narrow boundary that divides it from the land of insanity, surely this must convince her that to insist upon Margaret’s keeping to the engagement into which she was forced, would be tantamount to throwing her own daughter into a tomb! and if it has crossed that boundary, why, then she is no accountable being, and her daughter cannot be bound by the delusions which haunt her!”

To this effect ran his thoughts, but it was with strong forebodings that he left at the door the letter that he had written to Mrs. Willoughby; and with still stronger misgivings that, after many ponderings, considerings, and reconsiderings, he at length put into execution his determination to send the one that he had directed separately to Margaret.

Would it reach her safely? Would there be foul play? Would it fall into Mrs. Willoughby's hands? Would it be the means of occasioning double mischief? He was tormented by many such thoughts as these, that night, while he rambled through the town, or tossed sleeplessly about in his bed. And yet if he had sent her no word,—if he had left her entirely to the tender mercies of her mother's hysterical complaints,—would the trouble not have been harder for her to bear? Would it not have been harder for her tender heart to resist the plausible deceit of her mother's plaintive arguments? For how she must have been wanting him! This continually-recurring thought was at once his comfort and his pain, throughout the watches of that anxious, long, and weary night,—“How she must have wanted him!”

## CHAPTER XV.

AND how, meanwhile, had it fared with Margaret? During the interview between her mother and Charles Meredith, she had been in her own room. There, for a time, she had remained restless, anxious, but fuller of hope than of fear. Her heart was beating fast, but her thoughts were mostly very sweet, and her memory was stirring with freshly-awakened life. Nothing, it seemed, could disturb the blessedness of that most perfect life of love! She must stay where she was, she thought, for surely soon her mother would send for her! A wonderful, perfect, too blissful moment would arrive! But when would it come? How long would the interview last? Would her mother be quick to understand, and quick to be glad? She had too much faith

in the power of Charles Meredith's charms to allow herself to dwell on doubts !

But presently her restlessness increased. The blissful atmosphere of her memory was ruffled. The sounds that reached her struck a pang across her heart. And soon, the raised tones of her mother's hysterical voice filled her with dismay. She could no longer sit quiet. She got up and walked about the room.

Should she stay there ? Could she bear to stay ? Would it be safe to go ? Might she not be wanted ? Might he not be disappointed to find her gone ? Might not some harm come from it ? On the other hand,—would he leave without seeing her ? Would her mother refuse to let him see her ?—refuse to sanction meetings, that day and for evermore ? Impossible ! Absurd ! It was only one of those nightmare thoughts which are allowed to cross the brain, in order that the delights of daylight realities may afterwards appear yet more delightful. Impossible ! And yet it was a thought which would recur. By remaining, should



she lose her last chance of seeing him, without directly crossing her mother's wishes?

She stopped her ears that she might not catch the painful tones of her mother's voice. She unclosed them again, in order that she might hear the calm, quiet, beautiful tones of Charles Meredith's voice, which surely must have power to prevail!—that she might hear the music which surely must succeed in charming away the evil spirit of prejudice that was over her mother! Should she go? Should she stay? Again she caught the sound of her mother's voice, more painful, louder, higher,—more painfully and distressingly screaming! She could stand it no longer. She must go! She would go and watch for him, and join him, and comfort him! For he would be so miserable! He would want her. She must go,—he would be looking for her!

She began hastily to put on her hat and jacket,—hastily, with a sensation of fear lest something should come and stop her,—lest something should come to keep her from

seeing him for this last time! Ah, there was her mother's bell!—there was movement,—the door was being opened. She paused, peeping and listening. She heard Charles Meredith speaking, and a garçon answering. Then the door was shut again. What was going on? What did it all mean? No matter,—she might now safely make her way out. She was about to put her thought into action, when Jane, suddenly turning a corner of the passage, approached her mother's room, not without giving a side-long glance at baffled Margaret, who retreated, determined to avoid a meeting with the maid. In another few moments, once more she opened the door. It was at a moment too late! As she noiselessly opened her door, her mother's also opened, and Dr. Carl and Jane stood talking together outside her mother's room. Half a minute more, and he had descended the staircase. She had missed her opportunity! But no,—she might yet be in time. He would linger, looking round for her. She would venture out at once. He was want-

ing her ! Her heart beating fast, she hurried forward,—to encounter Jane, just coming up the stairs.

“Miss Margaret,” she said, “you ain’t never going out again, and your mamma in this state ? She wishes you to come into her room, as soon as she is fit to see you, and desires that you will not be out of the way.”

“Very well, Jane,” replied Margaret, quietly ; “I shall go out for a few minutes, and come in again when I think mamma may be wanting me,” and she was passing quickly forward.

“It ain’t no use, if you want to catch Mr. Meredith,” began Jane.

“Has Dr. Carl left mamma ?” interrupted Margaret, with dignity.

“He that has been imposing himself on us as Dr. Carl, and has ended in almost bringing my mistress to her grave, and doing all the mischief he can, is gone, and ain’t likely ever to set eyes on anyone belonging to her as he’s murdered again.”

“Murdered ? What nonsense, Jane ! Let me pass, if you please.”

At this moment two voices called, one from below and one from above. The owner of the one from below begged, immediately, to speak with the lady's-maid. The one from above was high and querulous in its call, first for Jane and then for Margaret. And Margaret found herself obliged to obey the second call.

But her entrance into her mother's room was a signal to the nervous invalid to fall into a violent fit of fresh hysterics; and when Margaret came forward to apply remedies, she put up her hands and signed her away.

"Go, go," she panted out, "go,—I cannot bear it yet! Go! You have broken my heart! I am a dying woman! Go!"

"Mamma," began Margaret.

But the answer was a screech, and as Jane came in at the moment, the poor child felt there was nothing for it but to beat an immediate retreat. She was too miserable to be amused by the ludicrous aspect which affairs had taken. Her mother's absurdities had already cost her dearly enough, and

were loaded with a fatal power which might bring forth graver consequences than had been caused by them yet. For, remembering and exaggerating Mr. Thomas' fears as to what might be the effect of disquieting influences on her mother's mind,—remembering his serious warnings,—she was afraid of thwarting her, although to yield to her unreasonable whims and cruelly unjust wishes would bring deepest suffering not only to herself, but to him whom she loved best in all the world.

She was about to make her way out of doors, when Jane, putting her head outside Mrs. Willoughby's room, said,—

“Miss Margaret, your mamma don't wish you to be out of the way. She may be ready to speak to you any minute, and she wants to say what she has to say while she can. Ah, there's no knowing what may happen! I never see her so bad as this before!”

“I will go to my room and wait there until you call me, Jane,” returned Margaret, quietly.

All hope of discovering Charles Meredith lingering outside the hotel was over, or, estimating at its true value Jane's croaking account of her mother, she would have found it in her heart and conscience to disobey the order brought to her. She knew perfectly well that she would be kept waiting for as long a time as Jane and her mother chose, and that she might be out of doors without hurt or inconvenience to the invalid. However, she returned to her room, and sat thinking as gloomily as though her love had been all a myth, and the joy which she had lately recognised as immortal had never had existence. She had passed an hour or more in this manner when Jane knocked at her door, and entered with lugubrious countenance.

"Now, Miss Margaret, if you've a mind to see a beautiful corpse laid out, all of your own making, now is your time to come in," she said. "There ain't a bit more life about her than if she was at the point to die, and she is as still as though she had been dead for a year. But she has such energy

that she'll speak till the last gasp comes to stop the word from coming out of her mouth."

"I'll come, Jane," answered Margaret, quietly and indifferently, and she followed the maid into her mother's room.

"Margaret," said Mrs. Willoughby, in a feeble voice, panting as she completed the word, as though the exertion of speaking it had been too great for her,—“Margaret, have you found out where the two real doctors of Fribourg live? Mr. Thomas will be sorry to find that the one he recommended to us has turned out an impostor!”

“Do you wish to see another doctor, mamma?” asked Margaret, unable to conceal her surprise at the question put to her.

“Have you not thought of it, then? Have you not sent for one? I forgot,—of course your thoughts have been otherwise engaged. No doubt Jane will see about it, but I fear it will be too late now! Margaret, I am very, very ill! I am sorry for your sake, my child, and I could have wished to lay my bones in the sweet churchyard at Grantham; but,



otherwise, a disappointed mother's broken heart can do no better than breathe farewell to the vain things of earth !”

“Mother, why do you frighten me in this way? You know that Dr. Carl has done you good, and that——”

“Dr. Carl !” screamed Mrs. Willoughby, sitting up energetically and entirely forgetting, all in an instant, that she was a dying woman. “Dr. Carl ! Margaret, do you mean to deceive me to the end? Do you forget that I have discovered the imposture?—that I have discovered all about the plot, which,—which,—Margaret, Margaret, how could you dare to come to Fribourg, knowing that Charles Meredith was here? How could you dare to bring him to me under a feigned name? Unhappy child ! Are your eyes even yet closed to the baseness of his character? Are you still deceived and determined to—to— Are your eyes still closed to the folly and wickedness of his conduct to Miles? Miles, who has confided in you, and continues to confide in you as trustingly as though you were as true in heart as he is

himself! Margaret, Margaret, I had hoped better things of you!"

"Mother, you will understand better, by-and-by," returned Margaret. "You will see how unfair you are, to me and to him too. Has not he explained to you? Don't you know that it is Miles who has turned out the deceiver and impostor? Did he not tell you — Mother, listen——"

"Explain?—tell me?" exclaimed Mrs. Willoughby. "Margaret, do you imagine that I would listen to anything he had to say, after I had discovered his true character! And is your vanity such that you are so easily to be taken in, by a mere adventurer, who flatters you, who pretends to love you, but who, in reality, merely wants you for your fortune and your family?"

"My dear mother, you don't know or understand. Listen, please! When you have heard the whole story you will no longer wish me to marry Miles. You will be thankful to have learnt the truth before it is too late. You will be glad that I have Charles Meredith's love, and that I feel him to be the only

person in the world whom I could possibly marry.”

“Dare you? Dare you?” screamed the maniac of the moment. “Remember, Margaret, that you are bound, bound, bound, by your promise!”

And the glare in her eyes filled Margaret with a terrible dread,—bringing a new recollection of Mr. Thomas’ words.

“Yes, mother darling,” she replied, soothingly, “but not if you change your mind; the promise was conditional, and you *may* change your mind.”

“Never, never,—I vow it,—never, never! Margaret, you must choose between your mother and that adventurer. If you are determined to have anything more to say to that man, I shall cease to look upon you as a daughter of mine. You can do as you like. You may go your own way and do without me, if you please. But you know the cost. Promise me, Margaret, promise me, that you will not see him again,—that you will have no more to say to him? Promise me, and all will be well!”

Her tone changed to one of gentle entreaty, and she caressed her child as she finished speaking.

“I can make no sudden promises, mother,” answered Margaret, firmly; “but of course I have no intention of agreeing to marry him while you refuse your sanction,—and hold me bound by my old weak and wicked conditional promise. But I do not think that you will be so cruel to me!”

“Cruel, Cruel! I, whose only thought is for you! I, who act only for your good! Cruel! Who is the cruel one? I—I—I, with shattered nerves, and fast failing strength, or the daughter who shuts her eyes to all that I have to bear!”

At this juncture the bell rang sharply for five o'clock *table d'hôte* dinner. Margaret, very unwillingly, exerted herself to obey its unwelcome summons and her mother's indignantly expressed desire. And if only Jane and her own nervous dignity would have permitted it, Mrs. Willoughby would have been glad to exert herself in the like manner. As it was, sighing over

the pleasurable excitement it was necessary to forego, she declared herself unequal to the fatigue of dining, sent for Jane, and told Margaret to return to her as soon as *table à'hôte* was over.

## CHAPTER XVI.

“LETTERS, mother?” said Margaret, when she came into her mother’s room again.

“Very extraordinary letters, Margaret!” replied her mother, severely.

“But one is for me,” said Margaret, reddening, as she caught sight of an envelope addressed to herself. Please give it to me, mother? Have you read it? Mother, you had no right to open my letter!”

“I had every right. *You* have no right to receive letters from a young man whom I forbid you to have anything to do with. Jane very properly brought both to me. After seeing the hand-writing of the extraordinary and audacious one addressed to myself, of course I could not be mistaken in the author of that directed to you,—and I felt it my duty to open it. He seems to

imagine that because I am ill and feeble, I am one of those weak-minded persons who are unable to resist a wrong,—to make a stand against imposture. He shall discover his mistake ! ”

The fact was, when Mrs. Willoughby had finished reading her own letter, her prejudices,—against Charles Meredith, and for Miles Grantham,—were a little shaken in their strength; but carefully though Dr. Carl had worded his note to her daughter, the passage in it alluding to his interview with herself had wounded her, had hurt her egoism and vanity, and all her objections to Charles Meredith had rushed back upon her headlong like a violent torrent.

“ May I read your letter, as you have read mine ? ” asked Margaret, presently, gently, feeling in a softened and humbled mood, through contact, *via* his written words to herself, with Charles Meredith’s mind.

“ Mother, I should have thought that would have opened your eyes ! ” she cried, as she concluded the letter which her mother had permitted her to take from her. And



then she turned again, musingly and lovingly, to her own note.

“Infatuated girl!” cried Mrs. Willoughby. “I shall reply to that letter in a few strong and decisive words, telling Dr. Carl that I entirely forbid his attempting to see you again, and cannot allow you to enter into a correspondence with him? Of course you will not dream of answering your note?”

“I shall answer my own note, mother, of course,” said Margaret. “It may be the last time that I have an opportunity of saying a word to him. You will scarcely refuse your consent to my doing so?”

“And what will you say, wilful girl?”

“I shall tell him, she returned, “that, against your wishes, I cannot see him again, or enter into a correspondence with him. I shall tell him that it would be best if he could manage it,—if he kindly would,—for him to leave Fribourg for a little while,—until you are equal to the journey home. He has sometimes said that he shall have to take a run by-and-by (it was to have been to England!), and his poor people must spare

him some time. I daresay this would be as good a time as any other,—and it would be best that he should go now, best for him! And, oh, I think it would kill us both to be in the same place, and unable to meet!” Sadly, ponderingly, Margaret thus spoke her thoughts aloud to herself, almost as though in forgetfulness of her mother’s presence.

“Margaret, don’t talk in this foolish, exaggerated, sentimental strain! Kill you, indeed! People don’t die, in real life, because their romantic fancies are crossed!” cried Mrs. Willoughby, angrily, and with that affectation of “sound common sense,” in which she sometimes indulged.

“I beg your pardon, mamma,” said Margaret, with quiet, rather proud and scornful, sadness in her tones. “I beg your pardon. I forgot you were hearing. You will not forbid my writing, as I say, to him, I suppose?” she added, after a moment’s pause. “I wish to do nothing against your orders. You will not mind my asking him to let us know if he is able to take his holiday now?—and to let us have his address in

case—in case,—oh, mother, in case some change should come, which should make you see things differently ! ”

“ That can never be, Margaret ! ” returned her mother, vehemently,—“ never, until Dr. Carl has succeeded in warping my judgment, and making a sentimental fool of me ! *Never*, while I keep my right senses ! *Never, never*, until his unprincipled mind leads mine into crooked courses, foreign to its nature ! *Never*, while I have a heart to feel ! a constant heart, which hates the very thought of fickleness ! Oh, Margaret, Margaret,—that *you* should so easily have been led astray by that misguided man, and your own wilful fancies ! ”

Something like a bitter smile of painful amusement curled Margaret’s lips, for an instant, but she attempted no other reply to her mother’s unanswerable remarks.

“ Have you nothing to say ? Has sorrow struck you dumb ? ” asked Mrs. Willoughby, sharply.

“ I was on the point of saying something more, mother, when you stopped me. Will

you mind my asking him to write that one letter, in reply to mine? ”

“ It will be as well for us to know that he is out of the place. For until we do, you are not to be trusted to walk alone, and Jane will not leave me. You can ask him to give me that information.”

“ And it will be only fair for us to be able to let him know when we have made the place safe for his return, so I may ask for his address? ”

“ I do not see the fairness, but I will be so far indulgent as to allow it,” replied her mother. “ But I must see your letter. On second thoughts, I hardly think that it will be necessary for me to make myself ill by trying to write myself. It is making him of too much consequence. You may tell him that I thank him for his audacious letter, and regret that my complete state of prostration prevents my being able to reply to it.”

That night, before she went to bed, Margaret’s answer to Charles Meredith was written. The next morning, with her

mother's permission, it was left at Dr. Carl's house by herself, and, for a little while, she was almost happy in looking forward to the one letter which she believed her mother would allow her to receive from him, and to read. But the day passed,—and no letter reached her. Another day, and then another, went by, and still she did not hear. She was ill, hardly equal to going out to walk, and having promised her mother not to speak to him if she met him, she was almost glad, at first, of the excuse for remaining in doors,—hoping, waiting, watching for the precious letter which she almost fancied might run away from her, in some mysterious manner, if she were out at the time of its arrival. But the third day she could bear to remain in doors no longer, and carried her aching and weary limbs out into the town, with a vague expectation of something happening,—something which, without her own fault, would bring her somehow near to him again. She wandered down the familiar streets where Dr. Carl's many poor friends looked lovingly out for the approach of their

good physician. She stopped to speak first to one and then to another. One asked if it was true that Dr. Carl was gone. Another told her that he had been to the house in a hurry to say good-bye, and did the Fraulein know if he was to be long absent? Fritz, in his plaintively pathetic tones, asked, "Will he come to-morrow, Fraulein?" And the old woman privately, with tears in her eyes, told Margaret he had given her directions and medicine to last for a long, long time, for fear anything should happen to prevent his coming again soon. She supposed the good God had need of him elsewhere, but it was hard, it was very hard! And her little boy would surely fail for want of him. In reply to Margaret's question, she could only tell her that some said he had gone off to the mountains, and that, if it were so, she hoped the Blessed Virgin would take care of him there and that no harm would come of him.

Sore at heart, Margaret passed by the now shut up and deserted house, up to the higher part of the town to the Poste Restante, to make inquiries. But he had gone without

leaving his address there, and several letters were awaiting him, which there was no one to take in at his house in Fribourg.

Days passed by. Margaret felt very strange and ill, heavy, aching-limbed and weak. But she was too sick and sore at heart to heed physical sensations, and continued to wander up and down about the town, like one in a wearily, slowly-moving scene in a dream.



## CHAPTER XVII.

MRS. WILLOUGHBY received frequent visits from one of the Fribourg physicians, and found this agreeable kind of dissipation very soothing to the nerves ! One evening, when she was in her better way, and had been talking with much animation at *table d'hôte*, she and her daughter were seated together in the court. It was a warm evening, and while the stars came out and the purple of the sky deepened in shade, still they sat on, although neither of them was entering into the spirit of the quiet beauty by which they were surrounded, or was affected mentally by the peaceful stillness of the atmosphere.

They sat on, while Mrs. Willoughby chattered at railway speed, giving her daughter scraps of information relating to various new

acquaintances, and while Margaret, tired, physically in pain, heavy-hearted and abstracted in mood, with effort made answer from time to time.

“Hem! How curious!” she said, at last, in reply to some remark of her mother’s.

“‘Curious’? What do you mean, Margaret?” returned her mother, sharply. “‘Curious’! Charming, I should have said, interesting, pleasant. Did you hear what it was?”

“Oh, I beg your pardon, mother! How stupid of me! What an idiot I must have seemed! I am afraid I was thinking of something else,” cried Margaret, with a laugh at herself. “Please say it again?”

But Mrs. Willoughby’s thoughts had been diverted into another channel.

“You are always thinking of something else, it seems to me now, Margaret. I can scarcely so much as get you to give a civil answer to a civil question. It is a great misfortune that Mr. Meredith ever found his way to Grantham! If he had not come on to the scene, we should all have

gone on being happy and comfortable, and you would have been proud of Miles Grantham's love, and you and I would have been of one mind, and all would have been right," said Mrs. Willoughby, fretfully.

Margaret's attention was not wandering now, but she was silent, because she had not known what reply to make.

"Do you hear, Margaret?" asked her mother, impatiently.

"Yes, mother dear," answered Margaret, in a tone of voice that was half-tenderly and half-wearily and wistfully beseeching. "Yes, mother dear, I was attending; but I don't know what to say to you. It all seems so sad, and I don't like to talk to you about what I cannot help feeling. You have enough to bear, without having me to bother you."

"You will make yourself ill if you go on fretting about him in this way," said her mother, still querulously, but yet with an undertone of affectionate solicitude which was not lost upon Margaret.

In fact, Mrs. Willoughby's conscience was not altogether easy. She tried to ease it, by

telling herself that all she had done was for Margaret's good. She allowed herself to be beguiled from the pain which it caused her, by the excitements of hotel society, which were so delightful to her, and by the interests connected with herself and her health, which she found still more thrillingly delicious. But having been once disturbed, it was not to be so easily set at rest. She had gone on for years, blindly following the lead of her egoism,—utterly unconscious that she was living a selfish and heartless life, until, at a sudden betrayal into a decidedly false step, she had awakened out of the dream of her long course of self-delusion. Blindness of heart, however, is not to be cured by a sudden awakening, and Mrs. Willoughby could not resign herself to such mortification of egoistical pleasure, as might have led the way to its removal. So the sensation of her love for her daughter still continued to be secondary to the sensation of her love for herself. Only there were moments when love would cry out so loudly, that all her selfishness was full of bitter pain. She had deceived her daughter!

She had wronged her! She had made her suffer! She would have "given anything" to be able to set matters right with her, to undo the wrong, to make her child happy,—anything, apparently, but the sacrifice of her own selfish will and pleasure!

"I wanted to amuse you, and make you forget your vexations for a little while, if I could," she continued, "but you won't let me. Cannot you turn your mind away from them for a moment? Must you always be thinking of him? You don't know how miserable you make me, Margaret! I can't enjoy anything for seeing you unhappy. And no wonder my head is so much worse, in spite of all Dr. Stultz's remedies."

"Don't think about me, mother darling," said Margaret, tenderly responding to her mother's touch of affection and anxiety. "I wish I could help people having to suffer because of me. That is what makes it so hard. I am afraid I should be bad enough if I had only griefs of my own to bear; but, oh, mother, can't you tell what it must be having to feel that someone you can't get at,

to help or comfort, is miserable on your account?—and not to know what may have happened to him,—where he is!—anything! He may be ill,—anything may have come! If I could only have heard from him! It is so strange there not having been a letter from him,—just that one which I asked him to write, which you would not have minded my receiving——”

Her mother interrupted her, sharply, but there was as much of pain as of anger in her tone.

“Did you expect a letter?” she asked. “You know I told you I did not wish there to be any correspondence between you. Why should he be ill? Why should you take fancies into your head? If you are to make yourself ill in this way, by indulging in sentimental griefs, the sooner you go home to your usual duties the better.”

“Let us go home, mamma? I don’t know that there is any use in your staying here any longer; the change back may do you good.”

Mrs. Willoughby sighed inwardly, at the

thought of the doctor she would have to leave behind her at Fribourg ; but, on account of her uneasy feelings, she hailed the notion of fresh change and movement.

“Let us go at once,” she replied, with alacrity. “Fix any day you like, my dear. Write home, to say that we are returning, and it might be as well to send Mr. Thomas a line.”

“I did not tell you, mamma, that I have a letter from Mr. Thomas,” said Margaret, dejectedly.

“No,—what does he say ? ”

“He asks about—about Dr. Carl. He had written to him, and wondered at not hearing.”

“Ah, he will be surprised and sorry to learn the truth ! ”

“But, mother, he knows all about him. It is as Charles Meredith that he thinks so much of him, and admires and likes him so much.”

“Margaret, what do you mean ? How could he know ? Was he, too, in the plot ? ” cried Mrs. Willoughby, looking pale and



frightened, and speaking with quick impatience.

“Plot, mother? There was no plot,—you know there was no plot! He will indeed be surprised and sorry to hear that we cannot give him the address! Oh, mother, it is so strange our not having heard,—I cannot make it out,—I cannot bear it any longer! The letter may be lost, and then he must be thinking it so odd, so cruel, that we do not write to tell him that we shall no longer be in his way at Fribourg! He will be anxious to return!—I know he will; he will not like to leave his poor patients for long! Oh, mother, what is to be done?”

“Perhaps he will venture to come back without waiting for a letter,” said Mrs. Willoughby, tremblingly and deprecatingly.

Margaret looked at her in astonishment.

“Would you not be angry if he did? Mother darling, would you really forgive us and be glad to see him?”

“Margaret, I can never cease to wish that he had not destroyed the peace—revived old follies—drawn you from your true allegiance,

—of course there could be nothing more between you, of course we must be true to Miles ; but I might—I might overlook the wrong that you have already done,—the deceit. There might be a reconciliation. We might receive him as a friend !

“ Oh, mother, if the letter would only come ! It might be all right,—I feel it might ! You are so kind, you would forgive everything, and learn to love him far better than Miles ! Ah, if he could only know what you say ! What do you think, mother ? Don’t you think he must have written, and the letter have got lost ? Perhaps they have mislaid it in the hotel ! Perhaps Jane——”

“ Don’t mistake me, Margaret,” burst in her mother, suddenly changing her tone again to one of displeasure. “ Don’t suppose he could ever, under any circumstances, take the place of Miles in my heart ! He has behaved dishonourably,—I can never look upon him in the light of one whose honour is unsoiled ! I wonder, too, that you are not ashamed to ask my opinion with reference to that letter. You know that you had no business to expect

to hear from him at all,—any letter he might venture to write ought to be to me. What difference would it make to you if there was a letter, if you were not allowed to read it? ”

“Every difference, you know! Mother, let us ask Jane again? If only *you* would ask? She may have lost the letter, and be afraid to say so! She may have burnt it out of spite,—for I believe she *has* a spite against me, and therefore against him. Mother, do ask about it? She may have pryed,—and know his address! We might forgive her, if she would tell us that!”

“Margaret, if he wrote,” said Mrs. Willoughby, in fretfully trembling agitation,—“if he wrote, it was very dishonest of him, it—it—” She hesitated.

“Mother,” broke in Margaret, “you know something that you have not told me! Was there a letter? Tell me,—do speak! Mother, I must know. Did Jane destroy my letter? Can you have discovered it, and yet not have sent her away? Speak mother,—please tell me, or I shall go and learn the truth from herself!”

“Margaret,—hush,—stay,—listen to me,” began Mrs. Willoughby, hysterically. And her hesitation would have been a prelude to a fit of hysteria, but that Margaret, in no mood to stand nonsense, chose to ignore the threatened attack.

“Yes, mother, I am ready to listen,” she said, decidedly; “go on, please, I am attending.”

“He had no right to send a letter,—you know that he had no right,” repeated her mother, in timid, excited anger. It was quite proper of Jane to bring it to me,—and if—if—if anything happened to it, it was only what you deserved. You know it quite well, Margaret, you——”

“And what did happen to it? Did you allow it to be destroyed?” asked Margaret, growing very white, and speaking very calmly and sternly.

Mrs. Willoughby was silent; Margaret could feel that she was trembling.

“Oh, mother!” she added, in a tone that touched her mother to the quick.

“Margaret,” she returned, then, in a

hurried, sharp, gasping tone, that was partly defiant, and partly apologetic,—“Margaret, you had hurt me very much the day that the letter came,—it was the day of my first visit from Dr. Stultz. I was extremely ill, but, in the midst of my suffering, was feeling much for you,—whilst you scarcely seemed to heed that I had anything to bear. You were unfeeling in your way of speaking to me, and in the little that you said to Dr. Stultz on the subject of my health. I could see that your thoughts were far away from me, that they were entirely engrossed by Mr. Meredith, who, I felt, had robbed me of your affection, and taught you to be false and fickle. You were more anxious about the letter you were expecting from him than you were about your own mother, although Dr. Stultz was evidently very uneasy about me, and hardly thought I should live to return to England.”

Contempt, indignation, and impatience, were striving for the mastery in Margaret's mind, but she only quietly said, when her mother paused,—

“Go on, please, mamma.”

“You may imagine what I felt when I saw the letter,—when Jane brought it in. I thought that you meant to defy me,—to go on deceiving me. I had not thought that you would really ask him to write to yourself,—after all that I had said, making known my wishes.—It seemed to me that he had corrupted your character. I considered it my duty to open and read the letter, and it vexed and angered me so much that—that—I tore it into pieces, and permitted Jane to burn it.”

“Oh, mother!” said Margaret, once more, in a voice of quiet, reproachful, despairing pain.

Then, suddenly, Mrs. Willoughby’s manner changed into one that was weakly and appealingly remorseful and piteous.

“Margaret,” she said, bursting into tears,—“Margaret,—I was ill,—a fit of hysteria was coming on,—I was weak, suffering,—I hardly knew what I was doing. I am sorry,—I wish I had not done it; forgive me, Margaret, say you will forgive me!—forgive me

before I die,—and then, oh let me die, let me die!”

“We had better go indoors, mother,” returned Margaret, with quiet irrelevance. “And please let us say no more about the matter.”

“Margaret!” shrieked her mother, as they entered the room together. “Margaret!” she shrieked again, after glancing up into her daughter’s white pathetic face, “do you want to kill me, or drive me out of my mind? Are you going to pine away and die, and leave me broken-hearted for the wrong that I have done you? Do you want to turn me into a murderer, and yourself into a martyr?”

The ghost of a smile here faintly curled Margaret’s lips, but otherwise the sad, sweet and yet strong and stern expression of the face, remained immovably the same.

“Speak, do speak,—say something! do you mean to stand there, looking like a corpse, for ever, for ever, for ever?” cried Mrs. Willoughby, shrilly.

Margaret laughed a little sad, hard laugh.



“Please lie down on the sofa, or it is you who will be looking like a corpse to-morrow,” she said. “Try to forget, for a little while. Is there nothing I could read to you? Let me read a story to you, till bed-time.”

“Read! Good heavens, are you bent on driving me out of my senses? Hard, hard, cruel, cruel child! Speak, say something, anything, about this dreadful, dreadful matter!”

“What *can* I say, mother, that will make things any better? Of course,”—her lips trembled,—“of course you would have told me if you remembered what address he gave? Of course,—I see,—I knew that it was of no use asking the question. I can say no more but that I hope you will not trouble yourself too much about your—your—about your mistake. Good-night, mother darling,” and stooping over her mother, she gave her a fond kiss. “Good-night, you are tired, so I will ring for Jane. I want to be alone too,—perhaps it will not seem so strange to-morrow, and I may not feel so wicked. Whatever has happened, or may

happen, I am glad, at all events, that he has written. Only,"—she added to herself,—“if the letter had been lost naturally,—if the loss had not happened in this way, it would not have seemed quite so impossible to bear it! Oh, mother, mother!”

## CHAPTER XVIII.

THE letters home had been written. Arrangements for the return to Grantham had been made. Margaret and her mother were to leave Fribourg on the following day. Mrs. Willoughby was now restlessly anxious to be on the move, to get away,—always, away,—away, it seemed, from the misery by which she was oppressed. For life had become to her like a nightmare. Now, she made wild and aimless struggles to free herself from the tight grasp of the demon of egoism. Then, involuntarily, as it seemed, she once more clung to the chains by which it bound her. The sweetness of fancying herself an object of peculiar interest and consideration was no longer sweetness to her, but she sighed regretfully over the remembrances of times when it had been so. She shrank from the

means of escape from bondage, even while she hated the prison walls which seemed to make a barrier between herself and her child. And yet she did hate them. She hated them and she hated and despised herself, as she never had done before. She despised herself, and Margaret, she fancied, despised her even more than she despised herself. And the smarting pain of this contempt, the thought that she had earned for herself the scorn of the daughter whom she loved, whom she yearned over, made the love of her heart often show itself in fretful murmurings and complaints. She was not worthy of her child! She was not worthy to approach her! She longed to caress and comfort her, but Margaret, she felt, would surely scorn such comfort as her vain, untrue, selfish, weak, and foolish mother had to give her! Sometimes at night she dreamed that Margaret was a baby again, and that she heard her crying for her, and could not find her way to where she was; and then she would awaken, crying out herself, and calling, "Baby, baby!"

Her "brave, sweet, loving Margaret! Her sorrowful broken-hearted Margaret!" Even when she felt the most drawn to her,—when she ventured close up to her, and laid her hand upon her aching forehead, or kissed her, or looked with wistfully appealing trouble into the sweet wan face, even then it seemed to her that she and her daughter were far apart in spirit. It seemed to her as if she was a wretched criminal, gazing from afar up into a pure world, which she might never reach, and that Margaret was a great saint, fixed in this lofty world, far above the touch of all that was petty, mean, and ignoble. And yet all the time, unconsciously, she was helping, was comforting, her daughter whom she had wronged. For even amidst her absorbing grief, Margaret felt the touch of truth which reached her in those wistfully appealing looks of her mother to be infinitely soothing. It seemed to her that she had been given the reality of a mother's love just when she most needed it. It seemed to her that she and her mother were now no longer apart. For

though Mrs. Willoughby had never said in words that she had lost her prejudice against Charles Meredith, Margaret felt that a change had come, that, at all events, something of the old unreasonable bitterness had passed away.

If only Mrs. Willoughby could have believed in her daughter's generous heart,—could so have believed in it as to forget herself in its love,—much pain and distress might even yet have been spared to herself and her daughter !

“ You are not going out, Margaret dear ? ” said the mother, on this last day at Fribourg, “ you are not going out, dear ? I want you to see Dr. Stultz. I expect him here every minute, and you are looking frightfully ill. I am sure you are not equal to walking about. We shall be having you laid up on the journey.”

The words were spoken in a tone of fretful anxiety, but the look that accompanied them was lovingly entreating.

“ Oh, I must, please, mother dear, go out on this last day. Indeed you need not be

afraid. I believe the air will do me good; and I am sure it would do me harm not to see poor little Fritz and the others once again. And besides, oh mother, you know I want just to make one more attempt at finding out whether anyone has heard from him, and knows his whereabouts.”

“That tiresome ‘*him*,’ who was at the bottom of all the misery and wrong-doing that had come! Oh, that such a troublesome break-in upon the old long ago peaceful, happy days at Grantham, when Miles was all that could be desired, and Margaret was always light-hearted and healthy, had never occurred!” Mrs. Willoughby hated herself while groaning in spirit over these thoughts and wishes; but yet she did thus lament and wish, and did thus groan within her spirit. But she made an effort not to betray her moanings to her daughter. She wished not to add to her trouble. And she succeeded in only betraying herself by means of a suppressed sigh, and a martyr-like expression of countenance! which, however, did trouble the real martyr afresh, while



she went her weary, hopeless way through the up and down streets of Fribourg.

But why should Margaret have been hopeless? Why did the cloud that hung about her heart seem so impenetrably dense? Why did it seem to her that she was wandering away into the valley of the shadow of death? Why did each thought which she thought of Charles Meredith seem to bring her a shadowy vision of one wandering before her,—always out of her reach,—through the same narrow valley,—the same cold and dreary valley of the shadow of death? Surely she was not without reasons for hope? Surely she might have reasonably believed that Charles Meredith would return before long in safety to his work at Fribourg,—that there would be little difficulty in finding means of communication with him,—that her mother, in her newly-awakened regrets and tenderness, would remember the conditions by which the promises drawn from her was bound? Why could Margaret see nothing but difficulty, trouble, and impracticability surrounding the path of her life?

Why did she fail to see the faintest gleam of hope on the horizon?—to find a single promise of better things to come on her mother's altered mood?

She would not have been able to solve the riddle herself. She only knew that the voice of the bird of ill-omen whispering at her heart, would have borne down the loudest spoken tones in which reason could have addressed itself to her mind. Reason! But what had become of her own reasoning capabilities? What had gone with her powers of thought? Where to had her senses flown away? If she tried to reason with herself, what a strange medley of feelings and sensations came rushing madly through her being! If she tried to think calmly, what a wonderful flow of disconnected thoughts came whirling and dancing about,—meeting and parting again,—through her brain! What did they mean, those oddly uniting and oddly disuniting thoughts and feelings? What was the meaning of all that was passing around her? The people moving by,—were they real people, or were they figures

working in a mechanically-acted scene? Why did their voices sound so strange? Were they speaking of something that had to do with her and her saddened life? Were they sent to tell her that the good which had been allowed to return into and pass again out of that life could never, never be restored to it more? Why did everything look so odd, so confused? What was the meaning of the whole jumble of jarring sounds and painful sights, which appeared to come to her, through some slowly-creeping mist that was gradually shrouding her in its chilly and darkened gloom? Why did it seem to her as if some heavy hand was continually dragging her backwards,—while she tried to press on to something,—what was it?—some spot that she desired to reach? But now a new noise came suddenly, striking distinctly amidst those which had been oppressing her hitherto! What was it,—this sudden clanging sound? Was it the tolling of a bell? Was the cathedral, which had brought to her once a renewal of life, bringing to her now a solemn message of death?

Ah, she knew well what it was saying, she understood the meaning of its message,—a reminding message from beyond the grave,—“Promises, marriage, death,—death, death, death!” She knew all about it now! The old mysterious death-song was coming home to her heart at length! “Promises, marriage, death,—death, death, death,—death!”

That was the meaning and end of the whole matter! All was clear to her now! Yet still she pressed forward, as though for dear life, while the song of the bell rang and echoed again in her heart as, “Promises, marriage, death,—promises, death!”

Mechanically she threaded her way, determined to reach the spot for which she was bound. But what would she find when she reached it? To what were her weary footsteps leading her?

“Death, — promises, marriage,—death, death,” rang out the bell as she arrived at the door of little Fritz’s home.

“Ah, the dear Fraulein!” cried the old woman, opening the door. “The dear

Fraulein looking so ill, looking so like a ghost ! ”

“ Death, death, death ! ” still clanged the bell, while Margaret crossed the threshold of the old woman’s house. “ Death ? ” Was this, then, death which was striking now with a new and bewildering sensation across poor Margaret’s hurriedly-beating heart ? Death ? Nay, rather Life ! “ Life, Benediction, Life ! ” surely this was the meaning of the holy song of the cathedral bell, as it rang on, still on, and drew forth an answer from deep down within Margaret’s soul. “ Life, Benediction, Life, Life ! ” for what was this that the old woman was saying ? “ It was too cold,” she said, “ for Fritz to be sitting out of doors ; he was within, in the room, and the good, kind doctor had come to see him ! ”

Was it life, was it love, that had brought such a sudden rush of music into the air ? Where was she ? Was she in the cathedral, —at that service,—that first heavenly service of long ago ? Was she at the gate of heaven ? Was she entering into the fulness of life ?

Had all her dreams of death and darkness faded away for ever?

“Life, Life,—Life, Benediction, Life!”

She followed the grandmother into the little lowly room where the sick child lay.

Some one was standing by the bed-side, feeling the little pulses. Who was the some one? What was this? What had happened? What had come to Margaret? Was it death, after all? Ay, it seemed to be no longer life, but death, death, now, in very truth! Nothing now but death, death, death, *death!*

The gentleman was an elderly man, Dr. Stultz, who had been attending her mother, and whom she was slightly acquainted with. Margaret, however, was conscious of nothing but that he of whom her wild dream had been speaking to her was not the some one present,—and of a sensation as though she were sinking down, for ever down, into utter weariness and darkness! But these two states of consciousness remained. She did not entirely faint away. It only seemed to her, while the kind doctor and the good

old woman came to her aid, and spoke in low tones one to the other, as though the dimness and the faintness were increasing everlastingly about her,—and she were passing from all dearness and sweetness and love into a depth of unbounded desolation. She came to herself at last. The doctor was just leaving the room as she did so; “Not for long,” the old woman said; “he would return shortly, to take the Fraulein home in his carriage; meanwhile the Fraulein must rest.”

What did it matter to Margaret? What did anything matter, but the one thing that had gone out of her life for ever? But there was something she had yet left to do,—one thing to say, to ask,—the last thing, she thought, before she died!

“How is little Fritz? Has he heard anything of his friend, the good doctor? Has anything been heard of him?”

The faintest tinge of delicate pink came into Margaret's white face while she made the inquiries, and turned her large sad eyes in the direction of the little boy.



“Not yet, not yet,” answered the old woman. “He is fretting because he has not heard ; but he must not fret, for the good God is taking care of the kind gentleman and will bring him back again, all in good time.”

“And no one has heard?” added Margaret, faintly.

No, the old woman said ; no one had had any tidings since Father Thomase had had the letter from some way-side place, telling little of his intended plans. No one knew his whereabouts. But they must trust ; the Blessed Virgin, who loved little Fritz and the dear Fraulein, must certainly love the good doctor, and would guard him and guide him, wherever he might be. But the dear Fraulein must not talk, she must lie quiet till the carriage came to fetch her.

So while the old woman chattered on, after the like fashion, or tried to amuse her little grandson, Margaret closed her eyes and lay still, in her death-like whiteness, until Dr. Stültz arrived to take her home in his carriage.

Then she tried to thank him, tried to speak, tried to question him about little Fritz, but found herself tongue-tied, and was moreover forbidden to attempt any talking. And it was not until after they had got to the hotel, and he had given his medical orders, and Margaret had somewhat revived, that Dr. Stultz began to speak of his friend Dr. Carl, and the poor patients whom he had committed to his care. He had gone off in a violent hurry, he said, leaving no address, begging him to look in, when he had a minute to spare, upon certain of his patients who required frequent attentions, saying that it was possible he might take a quick run to the mountains; but talking vaguely and incoherently, seeming utterly at sea with regard to his plans,—only declaring his intention of being back again at his work in a week or ten days.

“But I strongly advised him,” continued Dr. Stultz, “to give himself a longer leave of absence, for he seemed entirely dead beat, and had evidently been over-working himself very considerably.”

## CHAPTER XIX.

“OH, I wish, I wish we were at home again!” cried Margaret, with a longing, heart-felt sigh.

She was not only feeling the home-sick yearnings which illness in a foreign land must rarely fail to bring, but some irresistible instinct seemed to be calling her back to Grantham, and away from Fribourg. If she was to die, oh let it be at home! Let her dream back again to the days of her childhood! Let her die with English flowers and birds, and all sweet homelike things about her! So sleeping, so falling into a beautiful life from which Charles Meredith could not be absent,—thus let her die! But if recovery, if hope, if consolation and help were to be found, some voice seemed to whisper that it would be at home! Home!

Home! At all risks, at any cost, oh let her only get home! Oh, let her fly from Fribourg! Let her carry for ever about with her the charm of the Fribourg that she had found; but let her leave behind the Fribourg that had become haunted with miserable thoughts and feelings, jarring painfully with remembrances of joys which had passed away!

“Besides,” she said to herself, “we ought to go! It will seem better to me, when the poor old place is free from us. We have spoilt it for him,—we have disturbed him in his glorious work. He will be wanting to come back, I am sure, and will be afraid of putting himself in the way of temptation, and will not like to trouble us. Perhaps he will *live* in his work again, and all will grow peaceful and good for him again, when we are not here,” she added, with another sigh.

Mrs. Willoughby’s mood had unhappily changed once more, since Dr. Stultz had prescribed for Margaret. By her fretful complaints, perverse resolutions to put off the day for leaving Fribourg, sidelong hits at

Charles Meredith's "far from straightforward conduct," observations to the effect that, in spite of his stories, she had not lost her faith in Miles Grantham, etc., she had vexed and hurt her daughter, none the less for her professions and anxiety about her, and sympathy with her in her illness.

Dr. Stultz, although a little anxious as to how his patient would bear the journey to England, had sanctioned, and even recommended, an immediate move homewards.

"He seemed to think that it would really be a good thing for me to get back 'to my native air,' you know, mother, as soon as possible," said Margaret, in a laughingly coaxing tone.

"He saw that you were obstinately bent upon starting to-morrow, and knew that I was suffering from the pain and indecision," returned her mother.

"It will be cold here, soon, mother, you will be best at home," said Margaret.

"Cold braces the nerves," replied Mrs. Willoughby; but if you are afraid for yourself, of course——"

“Afraid? I? Mother dear, you misunderstand! But it would be a nuisance to be laid up so far from home, and a trouble for you.”

“A little setting to rights, from Dr. Stultz, will avoid all fear of your being laid up, my dear, I hope. What makes you so perverse, Margaret,—so determined to get home quickly? Are you hatching fresh plots?” asked Mrs. Willoughby, with quick suspicion.

Margaret leaned back in her chair, with an involuntary movement of fatigue, and before she could make any answer her mother went on more gently and kindly,—

“You are certainly not fit to travel yet, dear child; you look worse than you did when the doctor was here. In a few days I hope you may be all right and able to go.”

“My head aches, and I am tired,” said Margaret; “but if I go to bed, I shall be up to the journey to-morrow, if only you are! So good-night, dear mother.”

And giving her mother a sweet, wan smile, she went her way to her own room.

“You’ve hurt your poor mamma, dreadful, Miss Margaret,” said Jane, on coming in to help her, presently. “I don’t know whom you expect to find at Grantham; but missis won’t be fit to travel yet awhile. I haven’t seen her so bad, not for a long time.”

“I suppose mamma can do what she thinks best, Jane,” returned Margaret, wearily.

“Your mamma ain’t so inconsiderate of other people’s feelings as some people, miss. There’s some that makes more fuss if they get a finger ache for a day than others that’s always suffering night and day. Oh, Miss Margaret, how could you go for to talk to your mamma as if she only considered herself, when you know that her whole thoughts are given to you, as much as if you was a baby in arms! Keeping the doctor to yourself and all,—and not so much as seeing that missis was really the one who needed him!”

“I don’t know what you mean, Jane, you must have mistaken mamma,” returned Margaret; but she began to get an inkling of the cause of her mother’s ill-humour.



“Poor mamma! she cannot help it; I must not thwart her,” she said to herself, remembering with fresh alarm Mr. Thomas’ long-ago cautions.

Her weak and feverish state was making her exaggerate dangers and difficulties, and she lay down in bed with the sensation that life was made up of perplexity and trouble, and that all thought, and desire even, of happiness for herself, must be put entirely on one side. She had left off, she fancied, in her dreamy mood, so much as believing in its possibility. But she had more than one besides herself to consider, and self-sacrifice could not make all plain sailing for her.

The first thing, next morning, before she was up, she was surprised by a visit from Dr. Stultz. He had intended to come, he said, even if he had not received a note from Mrs. Willoughby, asking him to do so; but fearing from it that Margaret might be worse, had made his visit earlier. Indeed he could not say that he found her any better, but he still advised the immediate return home. Margaret spoke of her anxiety .

on her mother's account, but was assured that it was needless.

In fact, Dr. Stultz knew well enough that such real uneasiness about her daughter as would take her completely out of herself, would be the best thing in the world for Mrs. Willoughby's health.

Having reassured Margaret, he told her that he would not disturb Mrs. Willoughby at such an early hour, left his orders and his compliments for her, and, evidently in a great hurry,—for it would be a busy day with him, he said,—was off before Margaret had time to say that she thought her mother was not so well, and would like to see him.

In a few minutes Jane was in her room, and down upon her.

“The doctor gone, and you not sent him to see your mamma, and she almost in a dying state, this morning! Oh, Miss Margaret! I did not know that such undutifulness and down-right cruel conduct ~~h~~existed in this wicked world! If you are bent on going to-day, you must leave your mamma's poor bones to lie untended in their grave at Fribourg!

It is all very well for the robust to go flying about the world at pleasure,—for a dying lady it ain't quite so easy!" she said, with a great deal more to the like effect.

Luckily, Mrs. Willoughby was too deeply offended with Dr. Stultz to desire to have anything more to say to him. She would put aside all considerations of her own health, she said, and, ill though she was, would "go,—sacrifice herself for her daughter's sake!" But it was with the air of a martyr that she left the hotel. It was with the air of a martyr that she turned her eyes, from time to time during the journey, on Margaret, to express a hope that she was better, and beg that she would not distress herself on her account. It was a pity, she complained, languidly, to have to leave a place just when it was beginning to do you good. But she did not care, if the movement and excitement had the desired effect of diverting Margaret's mind from the notion that she was about to be ill. By degrees, however, her tone changed. She exclaimed, hysterically, that

it was a great misfortune that she had ever been persuaded into going to Fribourg. She had been against it from the first,—nothing should ever induce her to go there again; and she only hoped that Margaret would soon put all the sentimental nonsense she had learnt there out of her head, and learn to know the value of those who truly loved her, and to acknowledge that she had been right in her estimation of Charles Meredith's character.

Margaret rarely attempted to argue with her mother, when she spoke in this manner; and when she did once venture to remind her that she had changed her opinion, for a time, about Charles Meredith, and had said that she was ready to forgive and be friends with him, adding,—

“And oh, mother, if he *is* true, think what Miles Grantham must be?—oh, you cannot wish me to keep that engagement!” she bitterly repented having made the vain expostulation.

Her mother frightened her by breaking out suddenly into vehement reproaches and

accusations,—saying she saw well how it was,—that Margaret was determined to disappoint her, “to carry on the plot,”—and much more to the same effect. Then once more she was remorseful, and full of anxiety about her child’s health,—until again her mood changed into vexation that Margaret appeared to give her no credit for solicitude,—or into hurt and surprised murmurings that Margaret seemed to be quite forgetting what an invalid she was,—to be quite taken up with her own little passing ailments and troubles.

Oh, the weariness, to Margaret, of those journeyings home!—with the burden of physical pain and sickness, and weakness, added to that of anxiety and of grief, pressing upon her, bearing her down and wearing away her life from day to day! Oh, the struggles to appear well, that Mrs. Willoughby might not be vexed, the efforts to enter into her mother’s mood, to amuse her and sympathise with her, at the right times! Oh, the tormenting fears,—the vague, quickly-fading, painful hopes!—the strange quaint

fancies, the nightmare-like sensations that came about her, and oppressed her! the curious transitions from apathetic listlessness to a keen appreciation,—in itself an unsatisfied pain,—of the beautiful or interesting scenes through which she passed! New never-to-be-forgotten ideas and thoughts would suddenly strike against her mind in its pain. Views, objects, which would have appeared lovely to her at ordinary times, seemed often now to be transfigured, for her, into extraordinary unearthly beauty. A strange prettiness seemed to have taken possession of things about her which usually she would scarcely have observed. Yet much beautiful country was passed through, unheeded by her, while she knit her brows in painful thought, or leaned back with closed eyes, drearily impassive, or gazed around with eyes mentally shut, and sighed impatiently to herself, “Oh, when will it end? How will it end? What, what will be the end of it all? Death?” Ah, at times it did indeed seem to her that she was just falling away from all outward sur-

roundings,—that she was sinking, sinking down into some vague land of rest and forgetfulness,—some vague, sweet land! Sweet? Yes, it would surely, she thought, be sweet, so to fall, so to sink, so to pass away from pain and weariness,—until, suddenly, with a sharp agony at her heart, she would awaken from her fancies, and think, ah, no, she must not die, for he might come and want her. He must not come to look for her and find her gone. No, for his sake she must awake, she must not allow herself to fall asleep. She must not die! Death must be kept at bay! She must live, she must live! She must nerve herself to bear any torments which the world might yet have in store for her, rather than that when he came to look for her he should find her gone, lost to him, hidden away in the dark and dismal shadow of death. No,—with a shudder she turned away from the thought. She must not die, she must live, and wait, and suffer, and work, and even hope for him.

Meanwhile, her travelling companions were strangely blind to the fact that, amidst



her brave, womanful struggles, her strength was gradually failing her, that the lines about her wan pathetic face were growing daily sharper, the eyes larger, and the great rings about them of a deeper purple. She looked delicate, her mother thought, with an occasional touch of anxiety; but home air and cheerful Grantham society would soon set her up.

There came a day, however,—it was the day after the arrival at Dover,—when Mrs. Willoughby's eyes were suddenly opened to see something of the alarming change. Her child had made an effort to accompany her in a drive round about the town. But it had been too much for her strength. Her long state of faintness had alarmed her mother, and she had appeared so little fit for the following day's journey, that it had been in great fear and trembling that Mrs. Willoughby had decided to undertake it. And when they were whirling along at full speed, it seemed to her that a railway train had never been so tedious in its movements! Would it ever reach its destination? Would

it ever arrive at the Darlingster station? Would her darling live to the end of the weary, shaking, fatigueing journey? Would she reach home alive?

For once self was entirely forgotten by Mrs. Willoughby, and all the agony of a mother's loving heart was given up to Margaret.

“Too late! Too late!”

So sang a bitter voice of wailing, through the chambers of her remorseful spirit!

## CHAPTER XX.

HOME at length ! Was it too late ?

Margaret was in a kind of lethargy as she and her mother drove up to the door of The Cottage, and she did not awaken from it when she was lifted from the brougham, and carried through the hall to the drawing-room.

But when Jane had laid her down upon the sofa, she opened her eyes and gazed around her with a smile that went to the hearts of those about her,—a puzzled, tremulously questioning smile, and withal so pathetically sweet ! It might have been a smile brought from some once-known, far-away Paradise,—of which she dared not speak to others, and which she could only vaguely and yearningly recall to her own mind. The smile passed. She closed her

eyes with a weary sigh. And such a stillness settled upon the white, almost transparent-looking face, that the two servants who were present looked at each other in sudden fear. But as Mrs. Willoughby drew near, with only a thought of what she could do for her child, she glanced up into her face with the same gentle and wondering smile. She was dimly conscious of something sweet and familiar,—something dear and homelike, and yet something most strange and most unusual! For who was this who was tending her so lovingly? Whose tender touch was this on her forehead? Whose gentle hands were these that were arranging her pillows, and smoothing the sheets around her, after she had been put into bed? Whose presence was it that was so sweet? Was this some mother of whom she had dreamed in dreams, or whom she had known in some far-off, once-lived-in world?

And what was this delicious haven of rest, which she seemed, somehow, to have reached? Might she now at length, then,

with a clear conscience, lie still and be at peace? No,—surely something must be wrong! Her mother would think that she was making too much of her ailments, and neglecting her! She ought to be up. She must not let her darling mother suffer. But oh, what was this weight that pressed her down when she tried to rise? Who was it that forced her back again? Why must she have this oppression, pain, and difficulty,—these fightings for no avail? No avail! No,—then she must give in,—her mother must forgive her! And ah, how sweet to give in! How sweet to let herself sink, sink, lower, lower,—down to the arms that were waiting to receive her! For surely he was there,—he was calling to her,—wanting her,—she should find him as she sank, she should fall into his arms and he would press her to his breast. Was he not calling to her from the cathedral? Was it not his voice which she heard amidst the holiness and love,—amidst the warmth and the beauty? Ah she must go to him there,—she must sink and be at rest! Rest! Might

she rest? But *he* was at work! No, she must not sink; she must struggle again to be free from this burden of weariness; she must be up and ready to help him when he came for her! Ah, this painful pressure again! Why could she not get up? She cried out,—a nightmare cry,—and awoke to see her mother by her bedside. All night long Mrs. Willoughby had been watching by her child, and taking all motherly, self-forgetful trouble for her. Did Margaret know it? Did she recognise her? What was the meaning of the sweet, but bewildered, half-questioning conscious gaze with which her anxious look was met? Poor Mrs. Willoughby, as she knelt down to pray her long silent agony of prayer, or wept her silent tears, or prepared the invalid's medicine, would fain have hoped that Margaret at least was sensible that she was present,—that she was nursing her, had refused all aid, and was finding consolation in giving up her night's rest for her darling Margaret's sake. She could forget her need of rest, her headaches, her desire for

attention,—she thought she should never again care for any matter solely concerning herself,—her vanity, her importance or comfort ;—but she could not quite so forget self as not to desire the knowledge that her daughter was conscious that she was her attendant,—that she could suffer for her, that she was not wholly selfish.

In the early morning Margaret fell into a quiet sleep. She slept on until late, and when she awoke her mother had left the room, and Jane was her attendant.

“ Jane,” she asked, “ what is the matter? what has happened? Have I overslept myself? ”

“ It ain’t too late, Miss Margaret. You’re tired. Lie quiet a bit longer.”

How wonderfully gentle Jane had become! Something very extraordinary must have happened!

“ The doctor will be here directly, miss; you had better lie quiet till he has been,” she added, in answer to Margaret’s expostulations.

“ The doctor, Jane? ”



“Yes, miss; Mr. Thomas. Missis has sent for him at last, and expects him every minute.”

“Let me be downstairs when he comes. I must go down, or something will go wrong, and mamma will not like it.”

Jane expostulated in her turn, but Margaret’s manner was so imploring, that she gave way.

In short, a great change had come over Jane. All her self-confidence had left her. Whatever she decided upon doing, it seemed to her that she was taking the wrong course,—the wrong course, that is to say, so far as her own interests were concerned. For the secret of the change in her was this. She felt that the foundation of the kingdom over which she had long ruled was shaking. Its fall would be the fall of its head. What was the wisest course that she could pursue under the circumstances? Should she cling to its tottering stones, and if the revolution should take place, cleverly lay her plans so as to effect a restoration?—or should she escape from its walls, and build for herself a harbour

of refuge, where she should find safety and compensation in the approaching ruin? In plain words, she felt that her influence over her mistress was at stake, and questioned with herself as to whether she should make a struggle to maintain it by continuing to flatter, fawn, pity, and exert a favourite maid's authority, bearing rebukes and coldness, as she had hitherto borne querulous complaints and want of consideration, ignoring change of manner, showing a martyr-like surprise, if accused of underhand dealings or impertinence,—or whether she should alter her own mode of conducting herself towards Mrs. Willoughby, putting on a manner of respectful displeasure, expending all her cares and attentions on the new invalid, making it appear to the doctor and all others that she was taking pity upon the victim of a heartless and selfish mother, whose tyranny, as mistress, towards herself had been long uncomplainingly suffered. In any case, she determined to make the value of her services felt. She would be more than usually indefatigable. She would make

her mistress feel that the house could ill get on without her.

“ If she goes off into one of her tantrums, Miss Margaret will have a good word to say for me ! for all I’ve wronged her. She’d never be hard upon a body. Better stick to the gentle and generous, when you find yourself falling into trouble ! There, I could have loved Miss Margaret, if I’d had nothing else to think of.”

Thus ran Jane’s thoughts, a slight feeling of pain and hunger after a more loving state of things crossing the selfishness of her heart, while she arranged Margaret’s silky hair, wrapped her soft crimson dressing-gown about her, and carried her downstairs, in her firm, clever arms, as easily as if she had been a baby.

“ Oh, not on mamma’s sofa, please Jane,” said Margaret, in her tender, little, childlike voice. “ Mamma will be coming to lie down.”

“ Your mamma’s well enough, Miss Margaret,” replied Jane.

“ But please put me on the corner sofa,

out of the way; and please draw the screen a little, so that I may not have the light upon me?"

"What can your mamma be doing, I wonder? I should have thought she would have had nothing to think of but her child, as is like a baby in her weakness," said Jane, in an undertone, as she lifted Margaret on to the sofa, in a side recess, and wrapped a white cashmere shawl around her.

"Thank you, Jane; now perhaps I shall get to sleep, till they come."

And almost before Jane had left the room, she had fallen into a dreamy, semi-conscious doze.

## CHAPTER XXI.

Just after Jane had left Margaret, the door-bell brought Mrs. Willoughby hastily downstairs, in expectation of the doctor, and having put off her return to Margaret's bedroom, she entered the drawing-room, without expecting to find her daughter there, and without seeing her in her hidden corner.

She had lost no time, on arriving the evening before, in sending for Mr. Thomas, but he had been out of Darlingster, and though a message had been left, begging him to come as soon as possible, he had not yet appeared. In fact he was not likely to hurry himself, for he imagined Mrs. Willoughby to be the invalid, and did not consider her case likely to be so urgent as that of many another who required

his attentions. So as the hours wore on without his coming, Mrs. Willoughby had sent a message to the Hall, begging to know if he was expected there that morning, and had given orders that the messenger should go farther if otherwise.

She had just reached the drawing-room, and was standing by the fire-place, thinking over the story of her child's illness which she should have to tell the doctor, when the door opened, and Sir John Grantham was announced.

Mrs. Willoughby started at the unexpected announcement.

"Don't shut the door," she called out quickly to the servant. For she was restless on her daughter's account, and did not at all relish the thoughts of being imprisoned by a visitor.

Something about Sir John's look and air as he approached her, and gazed searchingly into her face, startled her, and made her shrink, with a sensation of shame, away from him. Instead of the genial cordiality which naturally formed a part of Sir John

Grantham's bearing, there was a stern and cold formality in his manner of greeting her, and he looked, as she expressed it afterwards, "so frightfully in earnest!" as if he had come to tell her that she was "accused of having committed some dreadful crime, the penalty of which would be the loss of Margaret's love!"

"Of course," he said, after coldly shaking hands with her,—“of course you have heard the news?”

"No, I have heard nothing,—I have been too much taken up with my anxiety about Margaret to attend to anything else," returned Mrs. Willoughby, hurriedly. "I—if you will excuse me, Sir John, she will be wanting me,—"

"Ah, broken hearts will sometimes cause illness, and death too,—death as a climax! It is worth while to worry those we love best into their graves, for the sake of a selfish whim!" broke in Sir John.

"Sir John Grantham,—you—how pitiless you—pray excuse me, I——"

"*Pitiless?* *Who* did you say was pitiless?"



Pitiless! Ah,—well, so this is what your change of air has effected for her? And what of him? What have you done with him—with Charles Meredith?”

“Oh, please,—pray—spare me! Another time let us talk of this. Margaret wants me,—I must go.”

“Never mind, wait a moment; she won’t expect you! She will only imagine that you are resting your head, and taking care of your precious health. Wait a moment, I have something to say to you.”

“Oh, be quick then! Please,—pray,—be quick,—for Heaven’s sake be quick; let me hear it, and have done with it,” said Mrs. Willoughby, excitedly.

“It is about Charles Meredith,” replied Sir John, with cruel, loud-voiced deliberation.

“Oh, stay!—stop!” exclaimed Mrs. Willoughby, starting up in an agony, and making towards the door,—“stop,—she may hear. Her door may be open. Her hearing is so acute,—she——”

But Sir John Grantham, rising as she rose, came forward and whispered something into

her ear, which brought all her movements and all her powers of speech to a stand-still, and blanched her cheek, and made her stand in mute, agonised astonishment before him !

“ Is it certain ? ” at length she found voice to ask.

“ My first news is sure as daylight. It has been proved to a certainty.”

“ But the other ? Oh, it cannot—oh, heaven, grant that anything so dreadful may not be !—that——”

“ Ay,—but I am told that we are not to expect heaven to avert the earthly consequences of cruel and spiteful actions done on earth,” returned Sir John.

That he was so solemn, so severe, so different from his former self, no longer seemed wonderful to Mrs. Willoughby. There had been enough to change him. She was no longer chafed in spirit because he kept her from her child. She stood in horror-stricken mute amazement before him, while with rapid utterance, and in a manner that seemed to speak of a feeling stifled and

pressed away down into the depths of his being, he told the tale he had to tell.

Before he had completed it, Mr. Thomas arrived, and at the same moment Mrs. Willoughby made the discovery that Margaret had been present during its recital! It now seemed to her, in her consternation, that faint sounds, movements, sighs, even gentle calls, which might have attracted her attention, had touched her hearing, even while she was completely engrossed by Sir John Grantham's tale,—even while she was dreading the moment when she must watch, with a secret in her mind, by her child's bed-side,—no longer solely intent upon her restoration to physical health,—but with a horrible dread, a terrible anguish (over and above all fears and hopes of physical death and life), laying heavy hands upon her heart. No wonder, she thought, that she had been haunted by the restless fancy that Margaret was wanting her,—that she could hear her feeble calls from up above!

And Margaret? How had the time passed with her? What had she heard? Amidst

feverish dozings, sudden awakenings, faint unanswered cries to her mother, curious dreamy sensations,—whilst the continuous flow of words was going on within her hearing, how much had she taken in of the sense of those words?

When Mr. Thomas and Mrs. Willoughby came up to her sofa, her eyes were looking large, and bright, and wondering, as though they had been seeing startling visions, the meaning of which, whether glad or sorrowful, she only partly understood. Two bright red spots burnt on her cheeks. And ah, how emaciated the otherwise white face had become since Mr. Thomas had last looked upon it! The parched lips were parted, and her breath came with difficulty.

“Who was it?” she gasped, in weakly excited tones. “I thought Sir John Grantham was here, telling curious things.”

“Hush, dear; here is Mr. Thomas come to see you,” said her mother.

“But oh, mother, what was it? It was so strange! Old nurse was here, I thought, and the baby. And yet we were at Fribourg,

and the baby was dead! And there was something dreadful and yet something happy and beautiful! Was I dreaming? Was it all a dream?—or was some of it real?” went on Margaret, hardly seeming, in her feverish excitement, aware that Mr. Thomas was present, feeling her pulses, and ordering her to be quiet and not to excite herself. But in a few moments his firm cheering manner and words had exercised a soothing influence over her, and she lay still, while he gave his orders, prescribing bed and perfect rest and quiet.

“We shall soon have you better, and everything bright about us, now that we have got you back at Grantham again,” he said, smiling his kindly smile, before he turned to leave her. But his manner when alone with Mrs. Willoughby was very, very serious. With great care, watching, and absence of all excitement, he hoped to bring her daughter round by degrees; but he did not hide from her his opinion that there was very great cause for anxiety. He spoke cautiously, but with no pity or encouragement. He said his say gravely and with a

business-like air, as though the case had not been one of any peculiar interest to Mrs. Willoughby. He did not spare her. He did not seem to know that his words were hurting a mother's already sore heart.

"Of course," he said, "it will be necessary to hire in a nurse."

But Mrs. Willoughby interrupted him.

"I think Margaret would rather have me about her than a stranger," she answered, quietly. "Of course I shall sit up with her, and nurse her myself."

Mr. Thomas uplifted his eyebrows. "*You*, Mrs. Willoughby!" he exclaimed.

"If I find myself obliged to rest occasionally, there will be Jane to take my place," she returned.

"You will need Jane yourself, if you are taken ill," said the doctor. And without intending it, he allowed the expression of his face to betray a slight touch of the contempt which he had always felt for this woman who now put herself forward as equal to the duties of a nurse.

Mrs. Willoughby observed it, but little she cared. Her heart was very full,—her mind

was oppressed with grievous and remorseful thoughts. All the mother was awake in her now. What mattered it to her if the whole world considered her weak and incapable? She loved her child. She knew herself to be equal to the work she was assigning to herself. And Mr. Thomas' contempt and irony could not intimidate her, or change her determination.

"I shall not be taken ill," she replied, "and if I were, I could do without Jane."

She turned round as she spoke, and Jane was close to her, pausing for a moment on her way to the drawing-room door. A scowling expression of hesitation was on her face; but as she approached her mistress, it changed to one of contemptuous decision, which seemed to say, "I should like to see you doing without me!"

Mr. Thomas knew more of the story in which Sir John had been interrupted than Mrs. Willoughby did, and was fully alive to Jane's underhand character; but he also knew her value as a nurse in sickness, and had not a word at present to say in her disparagement.



Mrs. Willoughby was quite aware that the woman had been as an evil angel about her, —influencing her in self-indulgence, to the neglect of her love for her child ; but she, too, bided her time for open expressions of disapproval, and cared nothing for the contempt put upon her by her servant.

“Did you call, please ma’am?” asked Jane, the innocent words becoming insolent as she spoke them.

“No, Jane ; but you may go to Miss Margaret, and carry her up to bed. You can remain with her until I come.”

Jane obeyed with tremblings, partly of fear and partly of indignation. A change must indeed be at hand, she thought, for her mistress to be “so independent-spoken, and so quiet,” that it did not seem convenient to disobey her !

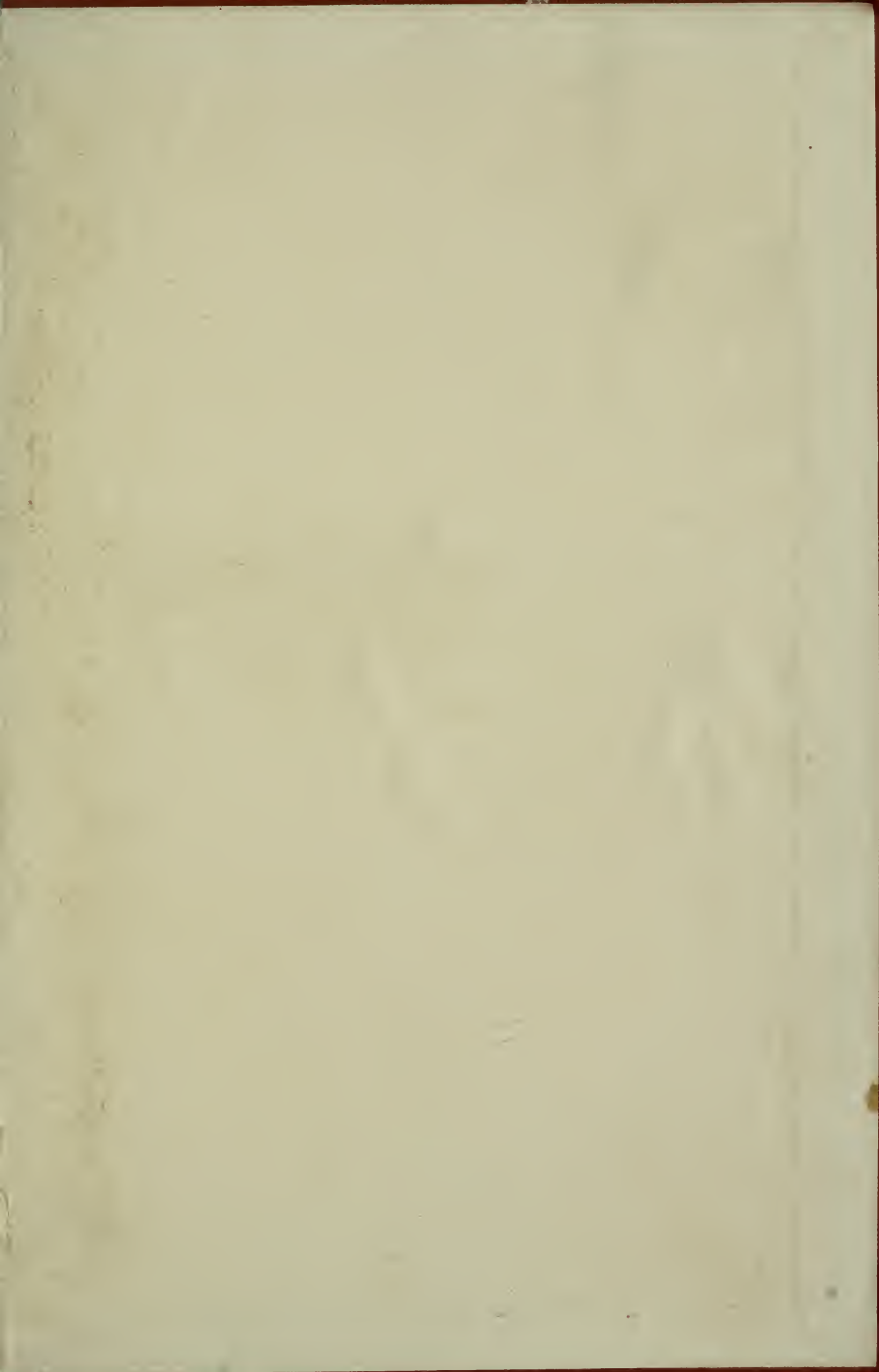
Her mistress, meanwhile, finished her talk with Mr. Thomas, and then came to take her place by Margaret’s bedside.

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